

*The Elegant Lady  
From Nymphania On The Hill*



*H.L. Dowless*



She was as an enchanting river of flowing moonlight, the manner in which she stood poised and fearless even in light of what existed as tangible, yet still standing in the distant beyond and imperceptible; but still the aura of her exterior being encompassed by an easy, tranquil, benevolent composure...., the very mortal souls could only pause to behold the bewitching manner in which she spoke with a voice of flowing water and gentle whispering wind. Her suitors were immediately mesmerized upon the very emergence of her form sauntering across the greeting threshold of her talented father's opulent colonnaded marble mansion estate. Her smile.....her captivating smile alone....bore the depth of her soul sailing within the anesthetizing river aura of the midnight moon, to capture and instantly seduce the yearning heart of any suitor who only paused to momentarily woo....

...Indeed there were many who paused, then were enraptured by her dazzling beauty, the very charm of her personality. Poor and prosperous alike dared to visit, each and every one putting forth the right foot of his best offering, the apex of his finest self, but any show of secular blessing carried with it not any show of gratitude in her composure or arousal in her inner yearning. She was already in possession of all that secular coin could ever hope to provide her with. Though she was politely thankful for the offerings, her inner desire was much more for enlightened intellectual wisdom and a genuine creativity originating forth from the innermost depths of the soul. For it was there within the depths of such enlightenment, that she knew she would be most certain to discover the conceptual sparks of sure love; and to her, this spark alone carried with it more light unto her embracing soul than the glitter that any show of prosperity could ever hope to bestow. In her mind it was that she well knew, that the glitter of secular prosperity could dim through sudden loss of fortune, leaving her with only the prevailing question of where it was that true love was to stand then; for in her mind she was to reason, what was it that could be, if in all honest truth, it never even existed there in the first place?

Maybe in fact, so reasoned she, such a hollow suitor sought only to purloin her inherited fortune, then casting her quivering body aside into the sweltering dust of the distant cobblestone street, only to

die a lonely forlorn death of deprivation and endless want. Such misfortune had certainly been known to occur in the recent past, and it most always happened when all others reasoned that it should not and could not ever, and the justified fear of it being so, reasoned only by all of them...., as being misplaced and unfounded....

I can recall vividly from amid the haze of elation in recollection.... the very day that I rode into her home town on a tarnished stallion, once soiled but now purged through an obvious diligent effort on my own part. I was not yet aware of her existence, but bore the feeling of a certain future success deep inside my breast. The general feeling was of a gambler's hint in premonition, that success in venture was soon to be within his present possession. Ahead there was a certain rise in the topography, a hill overlooking the quaintly large Aegean town, if you will. On that hill facing the town, with the clear ultramarine sea to it's backside, stood the opulent mansion estate of her exalted father. Radiating forth from this grand estate was an aura of hazy golden light, an emanating beam born first from the bizarre misty glow of the midday sun and the translucent marble calcimine of the mansion itself, then combining with a backward reflection from the clear cerulean gloomy reflection of light from the gently surging sea behind; *all* instantaneously combining to generate a *dazzling* aura that tended to blanket both the mind and the soul of any mortal who only paused there in the sand to behold the near immaculate portrait, even at a distance from beyond. Later on I heard many a claim that the same elation in portraits was to be felt even while out at sea, but of that as a fact, I know not.

My thoughts at the time were only of home, my family, my parents, my sister's birthday coming soon, and the birthday of my dear mother. I rode onward until the sand outlying the town transformed into the carefully laid granite of ancient cobblestone, the unorganized footpaths soon transforming into highly organized but somewhat narrow streets. Soon automobiles were singing passed, though I still moved forward while upon the back of my broken pony. My clothes consisted of sand splotched drifter's sheets, those of the wilderness nomads who so proudly roam the seemingly boundless island

sands abroad. About the crown of my head wrapped a wine hued turban, pined ever so delightfully by an ancient artifact brooch of the purest, I should say, nearly translucent gold. The golden brooch bearing the smiling radiant face of good fortunes' spectrum, whose form was one always to be held in treasured reverence, according to the island nomads. This brooch I had picked up amid the many ruins of those numerous time honored kingdoms now long since forgotten. Only the sand piles with the movement of the continuous wind and the howling jackals still dwell therein. Not even the buzzards dare to pass overhead due to the prevailing emptiness of the sand swept tree scattered expanse.

I continued to ride along until I came into the shopping plazas on the outskirts of the island town. There the shops were on either side of the narrow cobble stoned road, their gaping amphora and wicker baskets filled with spices, opiate tinctures, various local wines and special brandies spiked with narcotic herbs or curious mystery poppy tinctures of one sort or another. Some of these baskets were filled with local shop crafted amulets and jewelry, others filled with ancient artifacts collected by the desert nomads and sold to the shop keepers in bundle packages for a lump sum, only to be purchased by obvious English or European tourists, such as myself, for inflated sums as individual piece purchases. Along the walls hung obvious loom crafted, almost Arabic and immaculate Persian rugs. Dismal appearing but smiling shopkeepers always arise to stand upon my passing, pointing at specific items and announcing their latest sales pitch, my reply always being *“Konta, alla den einai arketa', isos mia alli mera?”*

Some of the shopkeepers would then throw the handfuls of their own selected items back into the display containers, their composure transforming suddenly from a melancholy pleasant into a harsh, unaccommodating demeanor.

“But you always say that,” they would scream! “Maybe tomorrow, maybe later on, oh...,but what about today,” they would ask in a seething, near rage? “We have families to feed! We need money today, right here and now! If you Englishmen cannot make reasonable purchase, then we will be forced

to charge a toll for the simple right to use our streets, since it costs us to keep them maintained, and all of us here know well that you people possess just a bit more than that which provides for basic necessity, to give in name of the maintenance effort spent.”

“I have to make a decision as to what it is that I desire. Show me something of adequate charm at a reasonable rate of purchase, and I will gladly make the exchange,” I would reply.

Two or three of them exited their shops, standing about before me to tactfully block my path, but to engage in a negotiating conversation simultaneously. I also felt that they were simply feeling out my inner demeanor, to investigate if any air of superiority infected my innermost thoughts, as well as to test my reaction to their imposing posture.

“We have shown you all that we have to offer here. What is it that you are in search of,” they all asked?

“I must admit here, I am in search of something... that is not what your average western tourist is in search of...Shall we say...something both ancient but yet holds the key to a present experience that goes far beyond what is usual. I want something that will lead to a daring experience, one of an enchanting enlightenment, if you will. The usual trinkets, charms, the intoxicating herbs...the stuff of the usual tourists' delight..., to be quite honest with you..., does absolutely nothing for me,” I replied to them in earnest.

“Well be out with it, man... What is it that you desire? How can we provide it to you,” they so harshly replied to me out of their frustration?

“It is like this,” I replied to them. “Just pretend for a moment...just pause here and pretend. If moonlight were an enchanting woman, then I want to hold her hand and be whisked away by her into another dimension... maybe for all eternity, indeed..., if I shall find her standing to my own delight. I want an element, I guess it is that I am trying to say, that will give me the key to the unattainable, *that one* of every secret desire in which the individual is both aware of and unaware at the same time...”

As we engaged in a conversation that was soon heating up, with half insisting on charging me a toll and the other half demanding that I make purchase of one type or another, a grayed and grizzled, long haired beggar hobbled up from the squalor beyond, pausing within the midst of the crowd, bringing the metal capped end of his six foot cedar staff down hard upon the ancient cobblestone of the dismal street beneath their sandal shod feet and the bare hooves of my poor spent stallion now with the fading grace of a plowman's pony at the close of a very long day.

“What is it that you want, old man,” they all turned to him and asked? “What brings you out into our street here today? Is it your desire for a crumb or a cast away scrap of some sort from this English miser poised here before us?”

The old beggar simply smiled in his reply...

“Certainly it is the one, I, who indeed can accomplish what the ten of you cannot..”

“And pray thee, what in Hades name is it, that the likes of you so boldly boast of being, that is so far beyond all of our capacity to produce,” all of them glared upon him in request as they laughed in derision?

“Well let's get down to business here...I can give the man here what he wants and all of you standing here, still have yet to even deduce a logical conclusion as to just what that something is...”

“Well do tell us then, old man of little means, just *what* that something is that you possess, in which you stand there are making so much of ?”

The old beggar stood, continuing to smile from within his chest length, snow beard of flowing white.

“Let it be said here today, that if I was to give my secret away, then so shall my profit fly..., forsooth..., away from my grasp and unto thine...! So on that note, I shall make my first address unto the Englishman alone saddled there before us...”

“O.K....,” I replied. “Let's get on with the offer, and I shall now lend you my thankful ear.”

“Just what is it, specifically, that you are so much in search of,” he proceeded to inquire?

“Well,” said I. “I am in search of what it was that I just told the crowd there of...I want an unusual experience, unlike any other sought by Englishmen or tourists in general.”

“Aye...”the beggar spoke. “That much I comprehend, and of course it all involved the hand of a delicate princess of one sort or another, if I shall recall right?”

“Some could surmise that much out of what I said, I guess,” I replied.

“Then son..., nothing comes without work...You cannot just pay a simple coin for what it is that you are in search of...; indeed *you must labor* for what you are in search of.”

“Fine then, what must I do,” I replied?

“Compose a love poem that would enrapture a delicate cherub spirit. I shall then take it to the angel who shall determine if it beguiles her into allowing your entrance into her palace door. If it does, then she shall offer me her golden key. If it does not, then she shall simply refuse it and send me away in disgrace. Let it be known here today, good sir, that disgrace is never my fear, since daily disgrace is simply any beggar's lot to endure.”

“If she does accept my poem, then what must I offer you for negotiating the arrangement,” I asked?

“Never mind that..She will offer me my reward for finding her the proper suitor. You do not have to concern yourself with that specific value.”

“Sounds like a perfect offer,” I replied. “Could I then find my own fortune with the woman? A man with a fine woman and no fortune, is simply not much to base a life happily ever after on.”

“You compose the hexing poem for her, then we shall simply just go on from there. Meet me back here at high-noon tomorrow, and have the poem ready for me and I shall take care of the rest,” he said.

Before I exited the plaza for the day, I did pick up what appeared to be a few antique Sumerian deity statuettes and a couple of turquoise Arabian amulets, just to mail out back to the family at home for their birthday presents and general gifts of my remembrance. That night by the fireside while camping in the sands just on the outskirts of town, I composed my wording for the mesmerizing poem. The



poem went something like this, to the best of my rum tainted memory:

*Ode To A Fairy Sprite*

*Upon the gentle winds of the midnight moonbeams she flew,  
more the composure of heavenly seraph than any mortal may ever dare to boast;  
directly into my heart she moved with the strength of an immortal few,  
only to whisk my dreary soul away onto some enchanted lunar sea coast,  
to savor those treasured pleasures that lay far beyond any mortal effort  
than even the most gifted of wise men knew;  
our effort to seek out those most divine elements  
that offer forth those midnight pleasures to a generous most,  
only producing an eternal twain both  
of me and my elegant angelic host.*

At around eleven hundred hours the following morning, I made my way back out toward the market square, where the old beggar was standing, waiting on my return. Soon my broken pony approached his figure.

“You are present at the appropriate time, so I can see. Let me have the poem.”

I handed the soiled paper to him. He snatched it from me, at once chastising me for using such dirty fragments. He then concluded by announcing that he would transcribe all of it onto a perfectly clean sheet for the lady to admire, rather than disdain. He carefully read my words...

“You mean that you intend to win her with this garbage....,” he inquired with a hard glare?

“Maybe,” I replied. “Just maybe she will embrace my words alone, if not my bosom.”

“We shall see, but all that I can say is that it does very little for me.”

Both of us laughed heartily as the old beggar turned and slowly walked away.

The next day at high noon I made my way back into the shopping plaza, seeing the old beggar standing alone again inside the central area, as if he was awaiting my return. To be honest about it, I never even expected to see him again, since he had not given me instruction to return at any given time. My ever wilting stallion soon walked nearer toward his soiled robe draped figure.

“What was her word,” I asked with a gentle laugh, not knowing whether to believe him or not. “Did she offer you the golden key?”

“No,” he replied, “but she requested that you appear in her presence tomorrow at this time, so be here by twelve hundred hours sharp.

“Isn't that somewhat strange,” I asked, “for her to make a request like that alone and not offer the key?”

The old beggar sighed deeply, then leveled off toward me in a hard glare.

“Sunny it's like this...It's her damn key, her damn house and her choice to see whomever it is that she so desires, as she desires to see them and on her own terms. Do you have that? I ask no questions, I simply do as she requests, then I receive my just rewards... and then I simply go forward on, in my merry way. Now...she has instructed me to find her a proper suitor, and I shall, and if it be not you, then it will most certainly be someone else.”

I laugh heartily at the beggar's reply, then I speak back to him as I laugh.

“And just what is your reward from this supposedly blessed vixen, may I ask?”

The old man stands glaring upon me as I laugh, then he takes a breath to speak.

“Do you forget that I am only a simple beggar? Sometimes she offers food, sometimes she offers a clean shower; then sometimes it may be a lone corner to sleep in, but then if the kind urge should strike her and I have performed my duties well, I might come to feel the sleek luster of perfectly cleaned satin

sheets. My station in life just depends on the feeling that she receives from my presence before her. I have a vested interest in making her feel well, don't you understand?"

I laughed again in my general disbelief of his story, then paused just a bit to reply.

"Sure...I understand old man. I will be here at the appointed time. This will be a most interesting adventure, even if nothing at all becomes of it. I will most certainly be here and on time, I shall say."

So at high noon on the following day, I arrived while still on my broken ponies back, walking into the market square, but I saw no beggar. I paused, gazing around in wonderment while the shopkeepers moved forward to sell me their products, but receiving my usual response. Fifteen minutes passed and I was near the point of remounting and moving on in my merry way, when this long black limousine bearing what appeared to be a gold plated grill, suddenly eased up beside me. The window abruptly rolled down, exposing the beggar's bearded face, but a well cleaned face with a manicured beard and perfectly cleaned clothes of silken robe.

"Get inside son, it's that time," he said.

So I did so, I found a post nearby to tie my broken pony, hopped inside the long car; and myself, the beggar and four more men eased along down the cobblestone.

"Where are we going," I asked the beggar?

"The first place is the bathhouse. From the look and smell of things, my bet is that you are in sore need of a bath," he said.

"Probably so," I responded. "I have been working offshore with an archaeologist now for well over nine months. We basically live out in the fields. None of us do not have much time for bathing, to tell the truth about it. As a matter of fact, we really do not even hold the necessity of bathing in any high esteem when it is only us and the male hands who are out there laboring in it," I replied.

The old beggar simply glanced over at me and slightly smiled.

"Well...all of us are going to this vixen's mansion home. Her father is very well off, to say the least.

This is your grand opportunity, since this lady and her family are certainly not the type to withhold on anything at all. They will simply just *say* everything as it stands. You are in with them or you are out, it is all just that simple,” said the beggar.

Soon the car made its way to the base of the stony hill upon which the mansion sat. There at the base stood a small colonnaded marble structure sitting at the edge of a flowing creek. Matter of fact, as we exited the car and neared the building, I could see that it was built completely across the creek and slightly down into it, just like the old time spring houses were in the foothills and mountains back home. The elderly beggar motioned for us to pause while he approached the building to knock upon what appeared to be a very heavy, elaborately decorated, door of solid wood. Out stepped a lady wearing a maid's long bohemian styled dress, who had shoulder length, well brushed, perfectly straight, shiny black hair; she kept glancing my way as the beggar spoke. Soon he motioned for me to walk forward. As I walked toward the building and stood beside it, the old man smiled quaintly and spoke.

“Well just go on inside there. That lady is the wash maid and her job will be to make sure that you are cleaned to the house specifications. Just go on inside and take off your clothes there. Go stand in the water that is flowing across the floor on the other side of the house. You see, there is a spout hanging on the wall, this is what she will hose you down with. The other lady there will soap you down..So go ahead there, just step up and get on with it; the both of them will take care of all other concerns, such is their employment to do so.”

I eased up toward the hook there on the wall. I slowly removed my range-clothes, then moved upward toward the flowing water. From the wall one smiling lady seized the shower spout and began spraying me all up and down with freezing cold water that felt as though it was cut with a razor's edge of sheer ice, right down to the very bone. I glanced down, taking full notice of my best part drawing back up into my body like a turtle head taking cover into its shell. The sight astounded me for just an instant..., like a flash I glanced back up into the faces of the two women standing, who then abruptly

exploded with bubbly laughter.

When the shower paused, the other who always stood nearby, began to soap me down with a heavy thick lather. This happened three times, then the ladies appeared with a large thick but extremely soft towel of virgin fleece to rub me down; one of the ladies then turned and disappeared, reappearing just as suddenly with a really fancy silken, toga styled, inside dress robe for me to wear at our hosts' prompt request. I stepped into my leather sandals and headed on back out toward the parked limo. I nodded in thanks to the smiling ladies exploding with laughter again as I passed, who very politely curtsied as I headed out across the bathhouse threshold. I stepped into the limo now feeling very refreshed, and soon we were all on our way again.

“That was certainly much better than I thought that it would be,” I said as I laughed slightly.

“Yes, oh yes indeed,” said the beggar with a slight smile and laugh. “We specialize in unique bathing styles here on *To Nisi Tis Nymphis*. Unto you foreigners, especially you English ones, the land is known simply as *Nymphis Nisi*. We have a number of other specialties that the international business guests enjoy indulging into as well. It is for those reasons and our rich resource base, that we are growing in such a phenomenal way these days. We are growing tremendously but trying to do so in a manner that preserves our ancient look and feel, as you can probably tell. This man and his daughter are two of the main hosts in this new wave of prosperous transformation that is sweeping us in our present time. If it is managed right, we will soon be the wealthiest, most desired island kingdom this side of the Mediterranean sea.

Behold the lavish bath houses and the elegant intellectual academies of reason and debate. Admire the number of our gifted philosophers, who ponder all that exists within and without, conceiving deductions based on what exists, as it stands directly before us and the conclusions in what lies within the unseen beyond by those suggestions put forward in details existing, as we observe.” he so proudly boasted in pointing with his right hand as we motored passed the establishments.

“I truly do relish what I see, but in my beholding eyes, there is still much more in the way of advancement left to endeavor yet,” I replied.

As we spoke the car rounded the upward spiraling road heading toward the summit, upon which sat the illustrious mansion home. Soon we paused between two armed guards, the chauffeur rolled the window down and handed a paper to the guard on the left hand side of the road, who read over it carefully, then allowed our driver to pass on by. Soon we paused there behind the mansion estate. A small crowd of people poured from within the house, gathering all about the limo, behaving as if they intended to roll out some sort of red carpet for us or offer some sort of other lavish accommodation.

I was certainly hoping so.; as far as I was concerned, I was in sore need by that time, of some royal pampering. I had enough of rough necking it way out in the boondocks, even though I can say that I truly love what it is that I am doing. The mounting need for a new thrill was nearing the point of demanding satisfaction. Again, I can say that the gambler's premonition reigned supreme in my intellect, that my future fortune lay just in the edge of my waiting for it to materialize. Before my mind could grasp what was happening in front of me, we were standing before a set of huge heavy wooden doors with a gargoyle of cast iron and gold plate wearing a huge customary nose ring, positioned right into the center of the door about breast high. Our chauffeur raised a right hand, grasping the heavy ring, knocking it down solidly thrice. A hard melancholy figure slightly opened the door to receive the beggar, who then conversed with the beggar in a language that I knew not. This figure more held the appearance of a somewhat aged, robed cathedral friar than a simple Butler, if indeed such was his title. The beggar handed him a piece of paper parchment and he proceeded to open the huge door, warmly welcoming all of us inside.

“Which one of you is it who wishes to visit with the misses of the estate,” asked the Butler?

“That would be myself, sire,” I answered.

“Are you prepped, pampered and wearing your proper in-house attire,” he asked with a hard cold

stare as he gazed me up and down. “The kind lady shall not be allowed the company of rogues and villains who dwell only inside the cobblestone void beyond.”

“And I shall certainly second that statement. Surely a lady of her standing would deserve much better from a world into which she only must make her appeal,” I replied with a smile and a slight bow in proper respect.

The Butler never responded, but only glanced up toward the others standing inside the foyer room.

“The others about, take your ease here in the chairs along the wall, and among the library books. You sir, please walk this way. The Miss is excited about meeting with her.”

I smiled and with a slight laugh, I made my reply..

“Well I am just as excited about meeting the misses. What's her name, may I ask? No one has yet to even tell me her name?”

“Yes sir,” replied the Butler. “It was intentional that you were never to know her name...until the appointed time. Our dear lady desires a man of an adventurous heart and entrepreneurial mind. If fear had been part of your character, then she reasoned that you would have neglected to make the move forward into her direction from the very beginning.”

“As I have always said, sire, what we fear always has a way of returning, no matter where it is that we stand or what it is that we choose to engage into. It is not that I never fear, I simply just push it aside and choose to advance forward in spite of it. Like it has all been said before, somewhere..., if death is my fear, then it shall surely return, no matter where it is that I choose to make my station.” I smiled as I continued speaking, somehow silently anticipating a sort of intellectual reply.

The butler never betrayed any hint of emotion, but only proceeded in his continuation.

Soon we walked down to the end of the hall as we had completed our conversation. The Butler reached forward with his right hand, causing the wall to abruptly open into two opposing doors, exposing what appeared to be a concealed elevator. The Butler then stepped forward as he turned into

my direction.

“Right this way, sir,” he said.

With the closing of the doors, the elevator jerked suddenly, then slowly made its way upward, humming lightly as it did so.

“Well...I should say, I was never told the lady's name. What was it..., again please,” I dared to inquire?

The Butler glanced my way with a quick flash, apparently with hesitation for some inexplicable reason, then replied with an occasional effort to force a smile.

“Thea..., indeed what a beautiful name...Thea of the clan, Selenofotos.... Indeed and without question one of the most endowed families in the entire Aegean about. Her Father, one Captain Hector Selenofotos, had been excommunicated from the original clan estate and holding, but rose up into opulence by his own ingenuity. First serving as a deckhand, laboring as any other laboring on board. Then he purchased stock in the ship and company commodity stock. Soon his stock account was worth more than the ship itself... by three times! So he cashed out promptly, then purchased the ship, earning the title of *adjunct Captain*. Now his earnings were two thirds of what the ship profited, the other third simply divided up with the ship captain, among his crew and company. The mercantile company only gained a simple base ten percent.

The management did not relish the idea of being responsible for the ship, ship maintenance and the like. Captain Hector performed the job with great responsibility and with pride. Now he could shift his business efforts onto dry land, since he had a steady inflow from his share in the ship.

Once onto shore, he invested in land and real-estate holdings. Soon he owned some two thirds of the town itself. If people wanted anything; albeit loans, products and the like, why, all of them came to the Captain for access and he gladly loaned the money out to the equivalent of one third value to the third time over in collateral. In the beginning he only lent money to purchase homes, land or gold and gem



jewelry. Later on, when the philanthropic urge struck him, he would lend out of the goodness of his heart, to people whom he knew had no other choice. On many occasions these people may own schools or houses of worship, or government; so it was in this way that he slowly came to own the town itself and the people here....that is, except any property within the market square or the hospitals... I am not criticizing, by no means mind you, since indeed the Captain was a fine gentleman of his time..., I am just telling the story as it is and was.”

“And the dear lady is now in possession of all of this, I would presume,” I asked with an inquisitive smile?

“Material need is not part of her quest, that much I can say with a sincere validity,” replied the Butler with another forced smile and a slow nod.

“This will be most interesting.., just to see what type of questions it is that she has for me,” I returned.

“The dear lady is very unpredictable and the stage in which all of our future presentations shall own, is all of her own design..., to play as she so chooses to engage it,” so stated the Butler.

Soon the elevator paused, the door opening, exposing what appeared to be a large study room, with a canopy bed in the backdrop, a desk at the fore and another at a distance to the left hand side of the room. No lady was to be immediately seen, however.

The Butler soon stepped forward from the elevator nine steps, then paused beneath the door post.

“My dear lady...I and your company are here..”

Immediately a lady dressed in a long antique styled Hellenic gown, her neck heavily covered by gem brooch, gold chain and jewelry of every sort, made her way across the floor. Her flesh was fair as the fluff of snow..Her hair was shoulder length, long and black as her freshly dug Virginia coal, but her eyes were of a crystalline sapphire. Both the Butler and myself carefully made our way across the floor from the elevator to the place of her seat. The Butler paused between us, motioning for me to take the

other seat opposing her position.

“Madam,” he said as I took my seat. “I present to you your requested guest, Magister Fortunado, before you presently. Sir, I present to you... Miss Thea Selenofotos,” he said as he moved his right hand in my direction.

I nodded in polite acknowledgement as the Butler spoke.

“A true pleasure to meet you, mam,” I said with a polite bow.

“And my pleasure in your presence,” she replied with what first appeared as an unaccommodating firmness.

“Surely this is a nice place that you have made for yourself here,” I asked, just in the name of making conversation, since I was not the type to sit, stare and remain silent?

“The place is not one of my own making, but that of my family. Lets do not allow ourselves to be guilty of straying too far from our point, however. I did not request that you come all the way here just to speak concerning the quality of my living quarters,” she replied in the same inflexible composure.

“As you wish..., so let's stay to the point, then madam,” I replied.

“I had a question that I desired to ask of you, in relation to your poem....and your answer will determine the status of our association from this moment forward,” so stated the lady. A compelled smile zipped across her face in anticipation.

“Ask your question..I have had it all asked before, so there is not anything left to cause me to jump out of the way,” I replied.

“ Very well then,” she replied, now wearing a somewhat sly intuitive smile. “If the sprite were simply a common mortal who bore no gifts, then where would you be? Would you be there, within her twain or would you be in pursuit of another, who bore gifts of gold and gem studded, golden neck chains?”

She smiled in smug anticipation as she asked me her deep philosophical question, as though she

expected an extraordinary reply from me.

“Well, that would just depend on the lady herself, in that case. If she bore no supernatural qualities, then certainly she would be of a different character, other than the one whom I described in my poem to you. Certainly then, I shall conclude, my stay with her would depend on the nature of her character.”

The lady then smiled with a quick giggle..

“What if her gifts were of personality and a caring warm composure..?

“If that was the case, then I just might remain there in her company..,” I replied with a slight laugh.

“What if her gifts were those of the sorceress, and she could produce anything that your poor heart so desired,” the lady asked?

“There again, if she was a foul nasty witch, then I just might go on in my merry way. If she was simply a witch, but a lady of pleasant character and fun loving, good accommodating nature, then I just might remain in her company for a while.”

We both laughed for a moment, then sighed into a calmness...

“So do tell me, then,” she requested as she continued to giggle slightly, “is that what you desire in a woman.., one who is a kind, fun loving, docile creature, who seldom quarrels or disagrees and is always in good form with you?”

“Now mam,” said I, “let's not confuse a pleasant nature with a slothfulness of the intellect. One can be of a pleasant nature, but at the same time, very quick to spy true opportunity, should it ever arise.”

We both continued to converse, both I and my maiden to be, until the hours passed and the light of day dwindled into the dimming light of approaching night. I had only planned to be in town for a week, but the week was to transform into three, then three more and so on. I contacted the chief archaeologist, who agreed for me to work but to take three days off on the weekend, since we labored for so many hours into the night. Most weeks we labored anywhere from seventy to eighty hours a week, in just four days, with little in the way of rest at night. My potential maidens' simple call established my place

of stay for that weekend, she actively requested my company with the conclusion of every week.

The weeks passed like single days, and both I and now my new love, were consumed by the surging waves of passion. She could never forbear the passion for matrimony, and I..., could never forbear her generous offering. Like the dream winds of misty moonlight, I was transported into the most elegant of local cathedrals...The elegant golden cross looming dramatically in the foreground from the wall behind the Priest, the incense lantern thurible offering forth the most delicate of its misty, passion inducing, herbal fragrances...The effects were trance inducing, most certainly the enveloping fragrance bore some mystical form of tincture, for the enrapturing feeling that consumed my very soul was one of us twain floating, rather than walking forward toward the blessing Priest.

As we both were transported forward I beheld what I perceived to be the light of God above radiating immediately downward upon us both, enveloping us deep inside a passionate warmth, like no other form of light possibly ever could. I make this statement from the point of perception that the light was more one born from an imperceptible intelligent force, than just a beam radiating downward. A single glance into her yearning eyes confirmed back unto me that the feelings inside her were those same as were deep inside me, transporting me into what felt as another dimension of existence...

The intoxication consumed me, even into the depths of my very soul..I could only hear the ring of the questioning voice but perceived not the weight of it's meaning, except only that the meaning was one of positive effect...and I always felt the presence of the observing masses behind me, the force of their very spiritual being radiating forward into both of our hinter directions there as we stood...

*“Doest thou, oh man of the secular void, take this lady of the elegant hillside mansion, Thea, to be thy beloved bride of the misty moonlight?”*

“I do,” I replied, feeling as though I was compelled by an immense unseen spiritual force to speak, but yet, at the same time, feeling confident that my reply was truly from the core of my inner being.

*“Do thou choose her above all others, to have and to hold, in the sanctity of true love amid the*

*elegant splendor of secular estate, until death do us part?"*

"I do," replied my compelled response, my willingness to wager all on some unseen possibility of new experience or even a potential future fortune, that otherwise would be void from my grasp in all probability.

A momentary pause ensued, enveloping all within the congregation and throughout, then my ears beheld the continuing questioning.

*"And doest thou one, dear Thea, oh thou queen of the misty moonlight, born from the berth of heaven itself; take this man of the secular earth, to be thy lawful groom, to have and to hold and to cherish above all others, until that very day of your passing across the dismal threshold of the secular, into the glowing royal divine?"*

"That, I most certainly do," she replied as she gazed upward into my eyes, absorbing my very soul as her enrapturing eyes gazed deeply into the heart of my very being.

*"And now, among the masses, does anyone within hold any valid reason as to why these two should not be wed," asked the Priest?*

A lone hand raised from amid the congregation.

*"And sir, what matters, indeed, is your justification for these two not being wed on this day?"*

"Certainly," replied the lone voice from the hind-side without. "That sole justification being that it was first I who made the gracious request for matrimony, and not the one before us here today."

*"And what base qualifies you to continue in request for the hand of this dear angel before us here today," requested the Priest?*

"Dear Sir," responded the voice from amid the congregational distance, "doest thou truly not know of my establishment? Have ye forgotten me, sir? My father owns nine of the shops out in the market square. We have real-estate holdings, some twelve in apartment tenements. Surely, what more can a person demand of one? What, indeed may I inquire, does this ground-ling have to offer that is above

my best? Nay.., I should surly add, *what* in fact, does he hold in trust, that is above any other within this congregation before us at this very moment?"

A rippling gasp and a murmur ran throughout the congregation like an invisible, though turbulent wave, possessing immense unseen power to destroy.

*"I should certainly conclude here before our congregation today, that the ultimate decision is that of the dear ladies' in the end,"* responded the startled Priest, who struggled to contain himself as he spoke.

"Thank you, dear Sir," responded Thea to the parish Priest, her face being steadfast in his direction. She now turned toward the source of the distant voice.

"Most certainly, oh good sir, you are endowed by blood in such a manner that well justifies your standing and request.., but my question unto you is this..Beyond your standing, what else have ye to offer outside of that? Were you of an intellectual status, then you could have deduced the valid position before you on this moment, offering us thy perfectly selected reply. I should say to you, sir, that your quick tongue hath betrayed thy lack of intellectual insight before all of us here on this very moment. Right here and now, in that regard, you have surely lost your footing with me!"

A laugh rippled through the congregation as Thea turned again toward the Priest.

"My choice stands as it is, let not that fact be held in disregard by anyone on this day of matrimony. Allow the ceremony to continue, but forbid the antagonist from entering into the reception hall. We shall all henceforth embrace the positive, and forbear all outside negatives from within our very presence!"

On that very instance of her words being spoken, a figure separated from the crowd in company with three other figures that appeared to be family, easing from among the congregation, then slowly moving through the opening door, only to vanish into the outer void beyond.

The Priest stood rigidly, clearing his throat, then raising both hands above the crowd.

*"On this note, today on this very moment, allow me to present Mr. and Mrs. Fortunado... Sir, both*

*you and the Mrs may turn to face the congregation.”*

We both turned to face the formless figures without, then returned to hold hands and face one another.

*“Sir, you may now kiss the bride!”*

We both embraced passionately, then bowed together before the cathedral masses who cheered with exploding applause....

....The reception was one of elegant splendor, the hallway filled with dazzling portraits of the islands' finest and most divinely gifted. The ballroom dance in graceful elegant medieval costume..; the heavenly hors d'oeuvres, the crystal tintured wine fountain flowing to bestow its endless blessings upon those guests in waiting... It all now seems like a hazy dream to the point that I almost question its reality, but it so surely occurred to the point that I wish that it could stand solidly on its own, even to the point that it would outshine the events that followed...

.... I recall well the earlier years of our matrimony. The events shine forward in my reflective mind as the most delightful splendor in personal experience, even to the point that the radiation therefrom pushes out any recollections of darkness that seek to penetrate through into my blissful euphoric heart. My present emotions are like those of a roller-coaster riding up and down on huge rolling hills. One moment I am ecstatic, my soul consumed with swoons of euphoria in my reflections upon a glorious past experience and most successful endeavor; on the other moment, in an instant and for no apparent reason.., I wallow on the bottomless pit of gloomy midnight despair, consumed in my own tears....Oh, just what am I to do..?

...I can still behold the gentle waves of cerulean against a distant horizon and a sinking orb of orange...I can still feel the slush of the golden sand beneath my feet and it's wet squeeze between my toes as we both walked along the edge and the gently surging water. On our right hand side is a dense wood of palm scattered in orchid oranges, reds, lavenders and calcimine. The fumes issuing forth were

exhilarating in the sense that it generated a giddy euphoria among the both of us.

Even before the sensation of fumes, both of us were giddy just being one in blissful company with the other. There it was that we lived for life, and our life was to be in the eternal company of one and the other. One without the other, the one remaining then bore no reason to carry on, no true reason for a continual existence, no matter what the surroundings may consist of.....

....I can vividly recall the walks on the beach, the midnight swims in the warm gentle waves and water, the explorations amid long forgotten ruins, the lines of verse composed, only to be read aloud and admired by the other who was always ready to lend an ear. I can still hear the late night serenades as we dine in the open air Parisian cafes with the full blush moon to our left hand balcony side, the many gondola rides down Venetian waterways that offered the feeling more of a water filled maze than actual river streets, the sky rides up and down many famous and infamous slopes of the Pyrenees. I can still hear her laugh as she crashes headlong through the heavy snow drifts, upon losing her direction.. and right into my awaiting arms on the other side....

Our lives were ones of completely contented bliss...like no other bliss known by mortal souls. Our entrepreneurial endeavors were nearly certain to succeed. While in reality, the fact of their possible failure mattered not in light of our standing, we both had numerous interests that we desired to fulfill. She had a hidden desire to open a shop selling high fashion dresses and clothing; I, on the other hand, had a desire to open my own book store and start my own publishing company. She assisted in purchasing a well developed marketing plan and both of our enterprises blossomed into a glowing success...This success and all of our adventures brought us gleeful happiness, not for the financial rewards, but for the positive feeling of doing what we had always desired deep within ourselves and seeing our own success blossom while remaining in the company of the other.....

The day arrived, however, when our clear skies suddenly darkened..I saw streaks of fire and heard the raging clash of storm and rain. In the midst of the rage and storm, I beheld the hideous face of



adversity, a face that I cared not to ever behold. My dear wife fell into the floor, consumed by intense abdominal pain, to the point that she feared for her very life. She gazed upward into compassionate eyes, weeping, reaching out toward me, begging me to assist her in discovering a means of alleviating the wrenching pain. I seized her hand and then her arms, lifting her up to transport her crumpled form from the threshold of our home into our awaiting ride. I cannot recall the type of ride that it was, I can just recall leaping into the front drivers' seat and activating the engine, then speeding out toward the most modern infirmary on the island. In the local Latin vernacular it was called *El Supremis Curationum*.

The infirmary was one of the few enterprises not owned by her father. In fact, the hospital was owned by a single speculating investor and his three associates. This speculator also owned the market square in town. All of them had allotted shop sections to it among themselves. These people had begged loans from her father, who granted the loans but only in lieu of the treble valued collateral. The general understanding was, as usual, that the debtor was to repay the loan or the collateral would be collected at three times the loan amount. When the debtor neglected payment, for whatever reason, then he lost three times the amount in property. Following that event, the situation between the family was never quite right again, but the antagonism was never immediately obtrusive, it was just casual simple "*slights*" that were noticed..Such as being invited to dinner socials and the other parties, then simply not showing up. Or the other party promising to assist in some sort of laboring endeavor, then conveniently not showing up; and when asked about it, only possessing an excuse that in no way justified the absence.

Just two years ago one of them had attempted to court my dear Thea. He has shown up at her doorstep with flowers, showing off his new Lamborghini with the gold plated grill and the diamond studded seats; he was always careful to show her his latest suit and tie. Other than that, however, he did not possess much to be desired. When Thea questioned him concerning his knowledge of the latest

novel or literary poem, he could barely even make a reply. Most of the time he could only laugh and shrug his stooped shoulders. When requested concerning the latest opera, he could only laugh again, and ask, “I can barely even understand what is going on. Why would I know anything about such amusements?”

In fact, all that he and his associates mostly spoke of was the success of *her* family and how much *they* must feel blessed more so than any of the others in town. Hearing the talk so frequently from them soon disgusted her to the point that she came to *dread* meeting up with any one of them. The family name just hooked itself deeply inside my head, for some unknown reason that I never could deduce...*Ekviostis*.

I rushed her to the infirmary, being guided into the waiting room while she was simply told to hold her seat and wait, even though she wreathed in wretched pain right there before them all. When I questioned them all concerning this matter, they rudely exclaimed that her fortune was no excuse for expecting special treatment and that she would simply have to wait her turn, just as everyone else. Upon my request that she then be administered pain relief, their coarse reply was *that everyone there in the facility desired pills for pain*, they so heartlessly declared. I exclaimed only that she was writhing in pain right there before them, and that no one else inside the waiting room was, but their reply was only a smirk and a shrug, claiming that they were so sorry, but that they did not feel anything on their part and that she would still have to wait her proper turn before they would examine her or even administer any type of relief. I was insistent, returning back before their glass covered reception window within three minutes, asking again and again, when it was that they could examine her, until they finally reluctantly remitted, taking her into a back room for the examination and the ultrasound. I remained in the lobby until the examination was completed.

Time passed, as I can recall, minutes felt as hours and hours as days, then finally the nurse called me into the back rooms. The verdict was *calculus*, she informed me. These were the culprits responsible

for all of my dear Thea's dreadful misery. I fell backward upon the message, a simple operation, I then reasoned. A simple incision, a removal, a two week recovery period, then all would be well, I told myself. A dear lady whom we both knew very well, from the island of Patmos, a very undeveloped area, just had such an operation and she was up and walking in some two days following. A week later she was completely revived. Surely we could expect much more from this highly developed facility.

My dear Thea was to be assigned a surgeon, I was told. Under his instruction and care, she would be most certain to heal promptly. I inquired as to the surgeon's name and I was told that his name was one *Ekviostis*. *Dr. Ekviostis*. I inquired as to what his first name was, but I cannot recall at this present time, I can only most vividly recall the surname...*Ekviostis*..

I walked on back into the waiting room, awaiting the surgeons' return. During that time we inquired again as to the surgeon's first name, still only the surname was recalled, but my wife had never heard of it. Seven dreadful crushingly painful hours passed. Finally the surgeon entered the room, and to my shock and surprise, he bore the appearance of an expatriate Irishman rather than that of your average Aegean islander. I inquired upon this observation and the Dr. stated that he had *married* into the *Ekviostis* family, and had chosen to go by that name, since it was legal on the island to do so and by doing so, he could then develop positive rapport with the locals. His true family name was *Bryant* and that ordinarily he was very proud to be known by it. He then continued on, explaining to both of us the proceedings of the operation.

He showed me a diagram of the procedure and the operation appeared to be simple enough, a single Y with the long side running from the liver and the intestine, and the small side simply a stem that supported the gallbladder. During the procedure his employment was to sever the gallbladder from the stem, then remove it through an incision, cap off the stem, then just stitch up the incision. All of it sounded basic enough for me to comprehend. I was game and so was she, since something certainly needed to be done to address this potentially serious matter....

My dear Thea wreathed in horrible pain still as the Doctor spoke, but she would be going in for surgery within six hours time. My Thea squirmed there on the bed, neither did the nurse visit nor the doctor advise. When I stepped out the door I saw the prices posted there onto the clipboard that hung beside the doorpost outside. First it was three thousand drachma upon our entering the hospital, then the price transformed into six thousand drachma for the examination just performed. It would be a thousand more for any medicine or painkillers administered. So far, our expenses were more than nine thousand drachma in total, and we had not even made it into the operating room. All of this cost was to be handed over in cash, and paid for in total completeness before any more services were to be rendered.

From my perspective, price was not an issue to stand between my Thea and her salvation. The pain both in Thea and myself was way too much, even near to the point of being unbearable, both physically for her and emotionally for myself. I dutifully paid out the amounts in gold coins, indeed without question nor regret. A few more hours passed and soon they had arrived with their dismal stretcher to come and take my dear Thea away. My dear Thea was wreathing with more intensity, even to the point that she was tossing and turning violently in the bed before me..*Why did they still not administer any pain killer*, I wondered in the silence of my mind?

An hour that seemed like an entire day transpired, and when they finally wheeled my Thea into the hospital room where we were to rest for the night, she lay there in the bed as though consumed by a perfect slumber, in complete peace. Momentarily, the sight was wonderful to behold. At least now my dear Thea felt not any remaining pain, nor did she wreath upon the bed any longer, as though wrestling with some unseen phantom aggressor. Six hours later the surgeon appeared again at our door.

“She is in positive form at present,” said he. His tall form appeared to acknowledge that he had performed the services to the best possibility that could be expected. “Tomorrow she may travel back home. She will be effectively released at 0600 hours, tomorrow,” he assured us. “All is well now, on

this date.”

I felt more comfortable with him being Irish and not one of the blood relatives of that family he had married into. He had been trained and experienced in Ireland as well, rather than out there in the island city alone. Later that evening a nurse came to the door of our room, demanding of my Thea that she arise and walk to the ends of the hallway there before us. Thea barely could sit up, and then only by my assistance. She could not make it out of the bed to stand, she could only sit there upon the edge of the bed and weep, saying repetitively that she felt way too weak to even stand, much less walk. She wept at the demand, saying aloud that she only desired to sleep and nothing more. The nurse finally exited the room, and we both remained alone for the night.

My dear Thea slumbered through the duration of the night. When she awoke, nearly at the same time, a nurse appeared at the door again saying to us both...”Well now, it appears that it is time for you to get ready and go home. Doesn't that sound nice to hear? You are going to go home after this horrible ordeal at long last.”

I moved around, assisting her in removing the gown and getting dressed. I demanded a wheelchair, and I received one following a wait.

“Be certain to pause by the exit window before making your way out. Once you pay our required fees for the surgery, then you may exit out and drive the limousine just outside our front door there. Our nurse will wheel your wife out to the car,” so stated our room maid.

I followed through on the orders. I paused at the glass covered exit window, the attendant asking me in an emotionless monotone voice that lacked personality.... “What is the room number again?”

“8-0843,” I immediately replied.

“What was the time and date that you entered into the facility here,” she inquired?

I replied with the proper time and date.

“The fees for service rendered will be nine thousand more for the surgery alone. We also need

another six thousand for the room and the room service, as well as the medicine given. The total will be fifteen thousand drachma for the surgery, the room and all other services following.”

I gladly paid the fees requested, but I could not refrain from asking the obvious question.

“Wow,” I said. “Thank the good Lord above that I possess the funds, but what if I did not? What would a poor person do?”

“Do you own property,” she snapped in a now rude sharp monotone, without making a smile and barely even glancing up.

“Yes, a bit,” I replied with a slight gasp then a laugh...

“Well, you will surrender that until the price plus interest has been redeemed,” she snapped very quickly.

“And what if I did not own property,” I inquired?

“ In that case, when she healed, and she would indeed heal very promptly...,your wife would serve the *Ekviostis* clan patriarch in his harem or kitchen enterprises and you would labor for him on his extensive landed estate, assisting him with gathering in vast stores of tobacco, cotton, olives, pomegranates, grapes and making wine on his vineyards...,until the value of the services rendered, plus all interest and fees incurred, were redeemed in full,” she coldly stated through an icy soulless glare.

“Wow, getting sick and going to the doctor here is really serious business,” I laughed as I spoke, just attempting to break the ice. The lady behind the glass never even glanced upward, remaining ridged as though she had never heard my words as I spoke them.

“Here are your discharge papers,” she snapped as she slapped them down onto the counter before me. “Have a good day and best of luck to you.”

I quickly glanced at the papers over, then upon being abruptly puzzled, I inquired..

“Where are the prescriptions for pain and the antibiotics?”

The woman replied in the usual monotone manner of speaking that she held to.

“Those were given right along with the surgery, dosed out inside the IV bag. Her body has no need for any additional.”

I told my wife to wait for me there, sitting in the chair, until I could get our car and park it just outside the front door. Supposedly the nurse would then wheel her chair out to the car. I left out, walked around the medical facility and into the parking lot just behind the infirmary. I got into our limo and motored around, coming to park just before the front door of the double glass doors into the foyer entrance. After an hour or so, the nurse then wheeled my Thea out toward the parked car. I exited the car, opened the passenger door and assisted her into the seat beside me. I smiled confidently toward Thea as we both eased out of the front door parking space before the infirmary.

“Well, my honey, we have you all patched up now. You'll be just as fit as a birch-wood fiddle very soon, before you know it,” I joked, attempting to raise the feelings and general mood.

Thea never made a return in reply, she just simply sat there right in the front seat of the car as though she were exhausted into numbness. I continued to motor on across town, attempting to speak just to keep her mind activated and engaged with what was occurring around her. I felt that doing so would insure her survival and hasten her general recovery, since half of recovering involves the issue of mental attitude, and then the medicine.

By the time we made it home, it was around 0900 hours, if I can recall right. I wished that she would go to bed, but she stated that she preferred to sit in our lounge chair out on the front porch overlooking the large town before us. We both carried on some fond conversation, our maids bringing us a bounty in fruit variety, since that was what my wife presently desired. I would sneak around the corner and tip the marble wine amphorae to pour me a strong crystal glass full from time to time. My Thea could not participate, since she had been dosed with the medicine and antibiotic, so I did not dare wish for her to notice me doing so. For quite a time that day, the sun shone with a brilliant glow and all seemed to be returning back to normal.

When the sun rounded the distant horizon, the heavy veil of darkness then returned. Once again fire ripped the sky, which then angrily growled from being treated so violently. A dragging, continuous wind appeared to blow across the entire town and into a then infinity beyond. Then the once bright eyes of my dear Thea, became sullen and dull. She turned to me, seizing her stomach with her right hand, saying..

“My dear husband, the pain is returning, and it grows with an increasing intensity. I may be in need of more medical assistance.”

“Oh my dear Thea,” I gasped. “Allow me to call upon the medical information line first, before we hasten a return back into the infirmary.”

“Oh please do so,” she replied in gasps of breath as she held onto her upper abdomen. “Oh please, please do so soon.”

I picked up the phone and called the number there on the discharge papers. A lady with a slow icy monotone answered. I described the situation to her, and she assured me that my wife's experience was only post surgical pains, since she had an organ removed just the night prior . Wait until morning, then examine her for her feelings regarding the situation. Usually the situation will improve overnight, she assured me....

The storm only worsened outside, with streaks of fire slashing in great angry lengths from infinity into an infinity, one right behind the other. The sky continued to rumble in its angry response at being disturbed. Then the rains commenced to pour in heavy sheets. My dear Thea then began to clutch her abdomen area and moan aloud in sheer misery...

“I only hurt more and more...I do not know how long it will be that I can tolerate this misery. The intensity only increases steadily, in dreadful increments. Help me, my dear one, oh do please help me...”

At 2300 hours sharp, my dear Thea was crying, pleading with me to take her back into the infirmary.



I told her to assist me in helping her get cleaned up, dressed, so that both of us could head on out. I assisted her in the effort to make it out of the door. Soon we were walking across the threshold and onto the front porch, then she abruptly changed her mind and for reasons which I know not, nor can I deduce any valid conclusion using any sort of sequence in logic.

“What do you desire, my love,” I inquired to her?

“Only to remain here inside, laying upon our plush couch.. Only the blanket of velveteen silk upon my heaving breast and you..., my dear love..., by my wreathing tortured side,” she replied as she lay drenched in ice cold sweat and tears.

So I carried her back across the threshold, laying her gently upon our feather filled mahogany couch. I administered foxglove tea for pain with a petite careful daintiness, such being all that I had on hand. I lay by her side throughout the night as she continued to weep in pain, still consumed by her own misery.

“Just give me the word, my dear Thea, and on our way we shall both then be..,” I whispered amid the flash of the night fire and rumble that followed..

“Only a bit more time and maybe my misery will thus end, and we can both then enjoy the company of the other once again,” she would gaze into my distressed eyes and reply. By 0500 hours she was tossing side to side, gnashing her teeth and weeping tears of sheer agony...

“Please, my dear love, transport me back into the infirmary, or suffer the looming possibility of my eternal loss..”

Immediately we arose, I dutifully assisted her in getting properly dressed. We had maids on hand who were willing to assist, but I never even bothered to give them notice. All that then possessed my mind was tending to my dear Thea, and assuring that she was properly nourished back into decent health. I moved so quickly that it was more like the passing of a dreadful dream, then we abruptly found ourselves back into the door of that infirmary.

Once we arrived back into the infirmary, I can honestly say that I had no trouble getting them to receive her, since she had not been totally released, as of yet, from the surgeon's care. They whisked her away, but simultaneously demanded that I pay for the upcoming ultrasound tests and the CT scan. The price demanded three more thousand drachma, before they would even attempt to initiate any efforts or explore the reason for this sudden turn of fortune. I paid with cash in full, without any sort of questioning on my own part, since all that occupied my mind at the present moment in time, was the health of my dear Thea. Upon the tests being completed, I walked into the room where the ultrasounds and the scans were performed. The skilled technician present was in her late forties, and obviously was in possession of long years in expertise.

“What did you find,” I inquired of her?

She hesitated, then struggled to answer my direct question.

“I don't know how to say it, except to say it as it so stands..., but the surgeon blundered badly. You have a stem leak that has not been sealed off....In other words, your problem is incompetence in your surgeon.”

“You mean that this man simply cut the bladder off, then neglected to cap the stem..,” I asked firmly?

She shook her head but with hesitation, signifying the word yes.

“So this means, using simple plumbing logic here, that the stem is leaking bile, filling up the empty space within her body cavity on the inside...and *that* is what is causing all of her misery..,” I asked with heavy emotion?

The lady shook her head up and down readily, though again, hesitatingly.

“I just cannot believe it,” I gasped! “I just cannot accept this oversight here..What is the meaning of all this?”

The lady only half smiled as if she did not know how else to reply.

“So how can this horrible problem be corrected,” I inquired? “In my mind, all that needs to occur is

that the stem simply be capped off..., that's it," I exclaimed excitedly!

"I cannot answer that question..I apologize here. The surgeon will need to answer that question for you. I simply cannot do so," the technician replied.

"Well, when can we see him again," I inquired?

"You will return back into your waiting room and just wait for his reply. I can immediately put in for your request to him, and he will get back to you..., probably in the next six hours or so."

"But my dear wife is in horrible pain," I exclaimed. "She needs for this matter to be addressed as promptly as possible."

"Pay the thousand drachma fee, and we will promptly address this issue of her pain. The surgeon in charge of your case will inform you of any other additional charges that will certainly precede her forthcoming surgery," replied the technician.

We made our way back into the surgical waiting room. Minutes lull away feeling like hours, and hours felt like entire days. The question that kept returning into both our minds was why, why did they force us to wait for so dreadfully long? Why did they allow her to suffer in such agony? In all honesty, my deduction from observation was that all of it was *intentional*, with the silent hope that another misfortune would arise that necessitated a costly repair. I gritted my teeth in a gradual seething anger, but in all honesty, *just what was I to do?* Where else did I have a choice about going to? Supposedly, this facility was among the very best. There were no other options, neither here nor on any of the surrounding islands. Not even the mainland could boast a better quality service in the latest medical services provided for the people to access..

My choices were obvious..We would just have to endure the negative possibilities, and when logic bore out the truth in negative intentions, we could only suffer and endure to the very end...hoping in dreadful silence for the very best outcome. Our faith would reside in God Almighty and the skill of this Irishman, who for the moment appeared to be very accommodating in general personality.

Before Dr. Ekvioistis entered the waiting room, and another surgeon wished to review her. Upon entering the room, he greeted us both with what generated the feeling of a *forced* smile. He requested that my wife lift her dress to expose her delicate stomach, he pressed around in a place or two, asking her if she felt pain. Upon her wrenching response, he then stood up straight and tall, turning to face me. His once charming composure instantly transformed, revealing a seething, teeth clenching anger underneath his calm facade. His breathing *obviously* became instantly heavy with a mounting rage on the inside.

“We are *NOT* a general practitioner service..You are aware of that, aren't you,” he snarled? “We are an *emergency* facility only!”

“But this was an emergency..,” I responded with both shock and lightning anger! “She collapsed out into the floor, wreathing in pain, and we came here as a result...If this was no emergency, then indeed, I am not aware of specifically what would quantify as an emergency.”

“What I am saying to you is that all of us are getting older and we must engage the services of a general practitioner. She had neglected to do so. Had she done so, then this matter would not have advanced into this level of seriousness. She only went to the local back alley shop herbalist, as I understand it.”

“But who can afford his extortionist rates,” I responded with the inquiry? “We are well off and we would have trouble doing so on a regular basis, as it appears that you are demanding so rudely..; his rates are literally *ridiculously* insane. I am absolutely shocked that the *law* here even allows such predatory rates, and all of the general practitioners everywhere around are nearly the same in their outrageous demands!”

I never responded otherwise, I just stood by in shock while he continued to examine her, then he arose only to walk out of the room without speaking another single word, leaving us shivering with cold and all alone to wonder as to just what additional horrors possibly lay ahead. In the end, all that we

had ever wanted to do was request medical assistance. We had no negative intentions, whatsoever. Where had we gone so dreadfully wrong in simply appealing for much needed medical services?

My wife continued to slumber there in bed for the next six hours. She had been loaded up with a variety of painkillers derived from poppy, and a number of exotic tinctures in addition. There was the anti-biotic, all of these services I demanded at once upon paying the additional thousand drachma. At least my dear Thea was no longer suffering in pain. Finally, at long last, in-walked Dr. Ekviositis. This time, however, his composure was more rigid and firm, not at ease in the least. Behind all of this rigidity, I detected an additional negative air of dark hubris, that kind where one is possessed but cannot admit to any level of incompetence, no matter how obvious that it is to any sort of observer. The feeling extended by my honest observation, was that I was dealing with a perverted type of dual personality.

“What is the verdict, Doctor,” I inquired, as much to investigate the demeanor of the person in suspect as it was to find out where my wife truly stood in her deteriorating condition?

“What is the verdict,” he sneered as he gritted his teeth? You dare to ask me *what the verdict is...*? I will tell you *what the verdict is then...* The verdict is that the stem upon which the gallbladder once sat is leaking, and it has filled her body cavity up and we have to address the issue at hand here; that's what the verdict is...,” he continued to sneer.

“Well... how are *we* going to address this matter,” I asked? “Something must be done, and very soon,” I stated.

“Well, it's like this,” replied Ekviositis, “I have a visiting Doctor who travels the world doing these types of operations like those that he will do on her. His name is Doctor *Aloise Von Mueller*, from the hospital at the University of Berlin, certainly one of the best on earth, if not the very best. He got his start during the war, beginning with his short stint in the military. I am not sure as to what facility it was that they had him stationed in, but it was one that was relatively well known at the time, I am most certain. This man brings many years of experience to all of us. This procedure is all that he does and I

have been knowing him very well for a long, long time now.

Well, this is what we are going to do to get this ball rolling on. First *we* need to pay the necessary surgeons' retainer fee, required for any type of specialty surgeon. As soon as you pay this fee and get your paperwork, just turn it in to your nurse, who will be checking on you promptly. When she receives this paper, then at some time following, indeed when the busy gentleman has the time to spare, Dr. Mueller will drop by to visit and discuss the procedure that he will perform on her. Right now, however, *we* must take care of first things first...So, let's get on with it," he said as he clapped both hands together and smiled a thin fleshless smile in my direction.

As the surgeon concluded his address with us, the nurse walked inside immediately behind him. She closed the door, then turned to make an address, so it appeared.

"How are you doing," she said to my wife. "I hope that you are feeling much better..are you?"

My wife only lay there and moaned.

"Are you in pain?"

My wife moaned again. This time she moaned louder.

"Very well, then. Lets get your new painkiller into your IV bag here," she said.

"Is that morphine," I asked?

"No, this painkiller is much stronger than morphine," she replied. "So I understand that Dr. Mueller will be working on you," asked the nurse to my wife?

"Yes, I think that is the name," I replied.

"Well Dr. Mueller is a fine doctor. He is really good at what he does. He has had many years of experience. Matter of fact, he has been doing that service more years than I have been alive."

"I take it that he must be up in age a bit," I inquired.

"He is, he is quite up there," stated the nurse. "But do you want to know a very strange thing about this man...; he appears much, much younger than he actually is. He appears at least half his age, or even

less. He appears to be not a year over thirty five, to be quite honest about it. Many say that he is a genius. He is not a good conservationist, I must honestly warn you..., but an extraordinary surgeon.”

“Where do I pay the money,” I asked her?

“Just go to the window out in the hall there. Hand them this form there,” she stated as she handed me some paperwork written in the local island language. “Then they can take up the cost with you. I must honestly warn you, however, that the cost for specialized work tends to run a bit high.”

“Just show me where that window is,” I snapped. “The cost for me emotionally is running much higher than my cost for this procedure, I can assure you of that much.”

I walked over to the glass covered window and handed them the paperwork through the slit at the bottom. The lady behind the glass opens it, carries the paperwork into the back room, then returns, taking her seat by the window.

“The cost will be thirty thousand drachma,” she bluntly stated in an icy voice void of any emotion.

“What,” I snapped in astonishment!

“If you want the procedure, then pony up... Otherwise we will be glad to escort both of you out into the streets there to find some medical vendor in one of those tent shanties to do it for you,” she coldly snapped.

“Honestly, I do not understand *why* it is that I must pay for Dr. Ekviositis' oversight. He should have to pay for his own incompetence, I feel. If any of us are guilty of oversight on our jobs and it costs anyone this amount of money, we would have to cover the cost..., then they would fire all of us. Why does he not have to endure any inconvenience for being incompetent,” I angrily snapped?

“Well, to be quite honest about it, it is not my position to discuss any doctor's level of incompetence. I am just the lady in the window that collects payment and files the paperwork. You'll have to take this matter up with the doctor,” she replied nonchalantly, without any emotion.

I did so then and quietly, even though underneath my exterior I huffed about it. Something suddenly

did not appear right in all of this business. I could not put my finger on it, but there was a *big* problem... *somewhere*. Sadly for us both, however, we really had no other choices but to use their services and accept their claims as being valid, even in the face of the fact that our gut instincts told us differently.

I made my way back into the surgical room where my wife was already in limbo. She still slumbered as though she were oblivious to every detail around her. At least she was not in any more pain. For the moment, I was even at rest in the matter. Some three hours passed, then the German entered the room.

“Hello there, Dr. Mueller..,” I said, attempting to maintain a nonchalant air. “What is about to transpire here?”

The surgeon strode into the room standing some six foot five and very hard in appearance. His complexion was hard and somewhat vivid, as though he tended to imbibe at the bottle a bit more than what may have been acceptable. His military short hair was a sandy brown and his character appeared to have been chiseled from the very stone of the hillside. He spoke not as he proceeded to mill about, shuffling two or three handfuls of paper work at the desk in the corner of the room. He then pulled up a stool, taking a seat before us with two or three sheets of paperwork in his right hand. He spoke to us as though he were totally void of any emotion or concern in any measure, as far as the human aspect of the situation was.

“Good afternoon, ladies and gentleman,” he said with a nod, in a heavy German accent that reminded me of Count Dracula, directly from the old horror movies. “Indeed we have a situation here before us at this very moment.” There was a pause as if he expected some sort of response, but when there was none, he continued on. “The good news here is that I have the proper solution to address this situation.”

“What do you propose, then sir,” I asked in anticipation?

“We are going to place a simple stint directly into the intestine, connecting the intestine at the point



of intersection into the bile duct. This move will effectively open up the bile duct, allowing zee bile from zee uncapped stem to drain backward into the duct and then drain into zee intestine. Once the drain ceases in its outflow at zee stem, then zee natural healing process will cap it off automatically. This move should correct the problem, almost instantly, but we shall allow a couple of hours to initiate it.”

“How are you going to insert this stint,” I inquired?

“We are going to make use of zee least invasive process..In other words, sir, we are going to avoid doing another operation to zee best of our efforts. What we are going to do, instead, is to take this hose that I am holding here, insert it down into her throat, and consequently, directly into her bile duct from there.”

As he spoke he held up a rubber hose that appeared to be approximately a yard long and about three quarters of an inch in diameter. This I envisioned him inserting down her throat with a camera on the end, then while observing in the screen above, he would manipulate a set of wires inserted into the hose, and in this manner he could manipulate the stent into its proper place. In all honesty, all of it looked like absolute *hell* to me, but I said nothing as I continued to just sit, listen and observe. My heart was breaking for Thea, however, deep down on the inside. When I looked at her laying in the bed like that, just thinking about the hell that she was about to endure..., it was almost more than I could even bear.

“The transport crew shall return in approximately four hours to pick her up. On the screen above you may view her status as we proceed along. The operation will not last but about an hour and a half at most. In a majority of the time, we are finished in thirty minutes or even less. When the crew comes inside to claim her, they will hand you the paperwork with the special number for you to view up on the screen and observe her status as we go along. There is nothing to worry about, my friend. I tell you, everything will be just fine,” he stated with a hard firmness in his low pitched heavily accented voice.

Before he made his exit from the room, he handed me a vividly sketched and colored picture showing what the procedure appeared as, hoping maybe that I could comprehend the exact specific details. The problem was that I *did clearly* comprehend the procedure, in vivid detail, like the screen on an HD television. In fact, the simplicity of it all was what upset me most, because I was wondering as to why all of this was taking place to begin with. In my mind I continued to ask the obvious question...; how did this *Dr. Ekvioistis*, a supposed master surgeon, make such an obvious oversight?

During the four hours wait time, my dear Thea slumbered as though she was totally unaware of what was about to take place. From time to time Ekvioistis would step into the room, looking about at the place on her stomach and sifting through the paperwork. I never could deduce the reason as to why, but I had begun to smell a rat..., an incompetent one.. or even something else more sinister, in fact. Waves of anger began to mount within my body as I glared upon him sitting there at the desk, with his back turned toward me. *He was now just as vulnerable to me sitting there at the desk ...,as my dear Thea was to him lying there so helplessly in the bed*, I thought in silence. How foolish of him not to realize this fact in the face of what I honestly suspected his true intentions to be. Did he think that we were all fools, only to be trifled with? I was determined to remain calm, however, and to think my way through this situation. I would simply allow the upcoming correction to take place, then I would observe and deduce the scenario from that point upon its materialization, once it was displayed before me.

The wait felt like days rather than hours. I imagined that the following morning had already passed, since I had not stepped outside to view the light of day in a while now, so it seemed. Through it all, my best consolation was that my dear wife was still slumbering. I knew well that while she slept, at least she was not in pain. The fact that she hurt, even in the very least, was *far* more than my poor heart could tolerate, but my feelings at present were slowly transforming from one of being consumed by astonishment at the fact of the situation..., into one of a gradual *welling heat wave of white hot rage*. I could feel it rising on the inside..., like an invisible hand *pushing* me to respond in kind to all of the

negative motivation surrounding me.

Why was there not a check somewhere within the system to hold these base extortionist tendencies of enterprise at bay? Where were the police during these threatening situations? Why did they not rush in to arrest these obvious criminals? I truly came to feel on the inside that the individuals who organized this hideously repressive system felt impervious to the consequences of their own motivations..Nay, I should say that the feeling was almost one of antagonism...like these monsters were *pushing...*, even *daring* the targeted individual to respond, as if they felt themselves *impervious to any consequences* that would be absolutely *justified* in forthcoming, be they legal or otherwise.

Without a doubt, if we survive this horrible ordeal, we most certainly will be investigating a new place to call home. Obviously if the deteriorating observed corruption here, broadly speaking, should continue, then the only step left would be a situation where the entire population was literally rounded up to be delivered into a labor camp containment facility, of one sort or another. Now that the astounding possibility loomed before me forthright, this fact of reality was impossible for me to deny!

Abruptly the transport crew appeared at our door to the room. I was somewhat awake, though my dear Thea, still slumbering. There were three of them with the stretcher by the door as they moved into place about her bed. Soon the one at the door by the stretcher moved it, parking it beside the bed of my Thea. The other two then simply tugged upon the cloth sheet beneath her bosom, transporting her from the bed directly onto the stretcher itself. They moved the stretcher heading out the door as two of them remained by the sides, raising the railings into place until they snapped. Soon they were heading away toward the operating room. The crew worked smoothly as a well organized team, each one taking up areas where he was strong, to replace areas where another was weak.

Up above the television a viewing screen told the stages of the operating process. Now she was in the preparatory process. According to the paperwork, the preparatory process was the one where she was being cleaned and anesthetized, allowing the proper amount of time for the drug to take effect. The

color was green in the code for the preparatory process.

Time passed, maybe twenty minutes, then the color changed from green into yellow, meaning that the beginning stages of the operation were being initiated. This involved moving her into place, since the operation would be performed with her body laying on its stomach, then the doctor running the hose down her throat. The process lasted approximately the same amount of time, soon the color transformed again.

This time it changed into red, meaning now that the situation had entered into the acting central process of the operation. This part was really serious, the part where one slight misstep could spell the difference between life, life underneath the weight of misfortune, or even death. Seemingly it went on for forty minutes, maybe even an hour or slightly more. I was really tense, glancing back and forth from the pages of a really good book laying about, back toward the viewing screen. Even though my eyes absorbed the picture before me, my mind registered not the content of the page, since the fact of the operation loomed so paramount in my mind. The time dragged passed, but finally it changed into a florescent orange, which meant that she was inside the recovery room. My mind then eased upon the very sight of her being there.

Now I could relax...somewhat. Situations could still take a turn for the worst, but the likelihood of that occurring had now passed, I reasoned. I could now read and concentrate on the material directly at hand. The orange phase lasted at least as long as the red phase, but I was relaxed in my contentment that my dear Thea has made it through the worst of everything. Soon the German surgeon entered the waiting room where I sat in anticipation.

“All went well, my dear friend,” he said. “Your wife is doing very well and is expected to do exceptionally,” the surgeon shook his hand to give emphasis to his words as he spoke in his thick German accent.

Very soon my Thea was wheeled into the room where I waited for her return. Still she slumbered,

appearing to have been heavily anesthetized and sedated. The figure that lay before me at the present did not even appear to be her, but appeared more to be a very swollen version of a bruised torso that was once hers. In thirty minutes she awoke somewhat, slowly moving her head from side to side, moaning as she did.

“My dear husband,” she said. “I am in deep pain.., so much pain...it hurts, my honey.., it hurts so much and there is just nothing at all that anyone can do.”

“Well I can do something,” I said with emotion! “Nurse,” I said as I called her through the microphone on my wife's bed! Soon a voice answered, asking what it was that could be done for me. I proceeded to tell her that my wife was in serious pain. Soon a nurse appeared at the door of our room, with the syringes in hand for the IV bag.

“This should stop the pain,” said the nurse. “It may take a few minutes for the drug to take effect, but it should stop the pain.”

“Please...the pain is becoming more than I can tolerate....Please..,” my wife began to weep! Within five minutes she faded off to sleep. The nurse headed back out toward the door, then paused, turning toward me.

“Don't forget to pause before the window down the hall there. They need more money for the additional painkiller and antibiotic.”

I winced in shock, asking..

“Well how much is it that they need?”

“I do not know,” she said. “You'll have to take the matter up with them.”

“I will address this matter immediately,” I said.

I walked on over to the glass covered window, pausing only to inquire as to the amount needed for my wife's care. The same icy monotone lady appeared to be seated behind the glass. She had an appearance of being chiseled from stone and possessing about as much emotion to go with it. This cold

demeanor, more than likely, added at least ten, maybe fifteen years to her overall slouching appearance, speaking descriptively as it was received by the people standing on the opposite side of that glass. I handed her the paperwork from the room number in which we were now. She quickly glanced through it, then glanced up into my face.

“Sir, that will be another thousand drachma...minimum, considering all of the advanced drug formulas and antibiotics that she has been given already just within the last two days.”

I said nothing, but quickly counted out the money in cash. Even for us being well off, the price for all of this was beginning to weigh somewhat heavily. On the inside, I really felt for people who truly did not possess the necessary funds to accommodate care. What continually ran through my mind was the question *Why*, why did the authorities allow an entity, such as a care facility, to literally *extort* funds from people in this obvious manner? It was not that I minded compensating professionals for services rendered, but the demand for the prices *far* exceeded what the largest percentage of the labor based economy paid out, especially after taxes, which was where the largest *majority* of people were employed. If I tried to loan money out at these ridiculous rates, I would have been thrown into prison. Why is it that the system allows outright extortion when it comes in from another direction, other than the individual person? The act is either wrong or it is not wrong at all; indeed there are no exceptions to the rule, if the system worked as it should in a substantiating way, even unto itself. Obviously, one day the extortionist system would all come crashing down, since in fact, it obviously could not substantiate itself long term, since there existed no form of check to curtail the weak tendency in mortal character for greed. Until that time arrives, honest, hard working people will just have to survive as best that they could, I concluded in the silence of intellectual thought.

I made my way back into the room where my wife was still slumbering, who was beginning to awaken. She wretched from side to side, moaning, saying that the pain was gradually returning. When I asked for more painkillers, the doctors claimed that she had received her limit for the time being. More

and more my wife wretched in gut wrenching pain, declaring that the pain was increasing back into it's original levels, before the painkillers were administered. Tears were flowing in her eyes when she told me of the horror in the pain that she was feeling, as well as the general experience of the surgery.

The nurse soon arrived into the room, abruptly. She stooped down to remove the IV and retrieve a sample of blood. She drew approximately seven inch and one half diameter vials of heavy dark blood. My wife protested, declaring that she was very anemic and already low on blood as it was. She placed the right palm upon her forehead, wincing in tears, saying that she was near the point of fainting. The nurse handed the vials to an assistant, who then stepped out the door with the seven vials. The nurse then asked my wife to take the thermometer into her mouth and hold it until she instructed her to open and release it. In the meantime, she seated herself before the computer and commenced to log the latest information into the facility website. After ten minutes, she arose from the computer to retrieve the thermometer.

“Hmm, you are running some temperature.. just a bit above our professionally deduced limit, so it seems. There most certainly exists a reason as to why. We are going to check the blood vials to investigate your white blood cell count, because what we suspect is infection. The question that we have is exactly *why* this infection exists.”

Seemingly in an instant the assistant returned with the vials and a report. She handed them to the nurse who scanned the report very carefully before making a comment. She then walked over to my wife, placing her right hand upon her forehead, saying...

“Your white blood count is high. What that means is that we must do a CT scan to investigate what the culprit is. We will hand this CT scan over to Dr. Ekviosis, who will then conduct his own analysis and give you his deduced conclusion from that information.”

The nurse then turned toward me, saying as she glared in my direction.

“Sir, what you need to do as we prepare for this test and exam, is to pause by the pay window just

down the hall there and hand that lady this notice. She will then tell you what you must do to initiate this forthcoming procedure.”

I took a deep inward breath, then released it..

“Sure..., let me have it,” as I walked past her and snatched it from her hand.

“Look,” she snapped as I stepped toward the door. I paused instantly, turning around in her direction.

“If you don't want to pay the required fees, then just don't,” she snapped with a sneer. “It is all at your choice, not our demand.”

“But my dear Thea needs healing,” I replied. “Her receiving that much from you is all that I ask in return...Heal her., please do not prolong her horrible suffering.”

“Alright then, just do what is required without such an attitude...and then we can get on with the process..,” the nurse replied with a hard glare on her face.

I snapped around, then headed on down the hallway toward the window, pausing before the glass, then pushing the notice through the slit at the bottom of the glass. The lady behind the window glanced down upon the note, then quickly glanced up. She turned toward a computer that sat on a small desk behind her, typed in some information, then snapped back around, glancing quickly up into my eyes.

“The entire upcoming process.., the test, the surgical evaluation, any potential painkillers and anti-biotic..will come to a total of ...five thousand drachma.., in raw cash only, please.”

I simply shook my head as I dove my right hand into my left rear pocket to retrieve the cash money. I felt like shaking my head and weeping, but only followed through on the command, like a robot that had been programmed in some sort of manner. I retrieved a large handful of gold coins that represented thousands, carefully counting them out to her through the slot.

“Well good sir,” she smiled as she collected my coin, “just proceed back into the room where your wife is and the transport crew will be there to take her back shortly.”

I could only stand by in idle, shaking my head in astonished disbelief. How could these people be so



calloused? If they truly possessed the gift of healing, then why was it that they were so self-serving and outright greedy, refusing to give *anybody* a reasonable break out of basic compassion or even general concern? To me, it all appeared as if they were more concerned with their profit margin than the health of the patient. I turned away and headed back toward the room where my dear wife lay. The time passed in a way that felt like an eternity, but the transport crew entered abruptly, opening the door to our room with a slam. As usual, there were three of them and the stretcher.

Two of them moved the stretcher into our room up adjacent to the bed of my wife, the other walked over toward the opposing side, apparently just in case there existed a need for any assistance from that direction. The two on the side opposite from where I was standing simply seized the cloth sheet underneath my wife's torso, and pulled, the other assisted in steadying her body so that she would make the switch from the bed onto the stretcher. In an instant she was over and the three were stabilizing her onto the stretcher, then all three of them proceeded to snap the side rails into place. The three moved like well rehearsed performing artists, just as smoothly as a spring breeze. Before I could even gasp, they were whisking her away down the hall, toward a destination that I could not discern, other than just through the information that I had been given. I could do anything at all but simply wait...and pray for the very best. I was powerless at the present moment..., a situation that I was finding myself deeply entwined with on an ever increasing level of incidence...and one that I hated with a demons' passion.

I walked outside of the surgical waiting room and waited inside the main waiting room. On the inside they had a television and a developed collection of magazines on multiple subjects. Other people were inside there whom I could converse with. Most of the people present were suffering through difficult times themselves and more than willing to speak from the bottom of their heart about any subject matter imaginable, just as long as it was not one way out in left field somewhere. What both I and the others desired to hear was talk of life's pleasantries and happy times, not despair or agony of any sort.

An hour seemed like a day, then abruptly, the nurse appeared to call me back into the room for the doctor's review. I walked back down the hallway and into the surgical waiting room, where the patient was held before being transported back into the operating room. There sat Dr. Ekviositis in the desk chair to greet me as I walked through. His tall, middle aged emotionless form sitting there to relay the conclusive results. I glanced over toward my dear wife, who was now conscious and communicative but completely immobilized there in the bed.

“Good afternoon,” he glanced over at me, then toward Thea and said. “We've reviewed the test results and I was asked to conclude...and my conclusion is that you need another operation,” he said with an adamant firmness.

“What sort of operation,” I asked?

“Well, I need to open her up again and search around a bit, to see what there may be to find that needs repairing...,” he stated completely void of an compassion whatsoever, but appearing agitated that I would dare to ask questions, nodding his head as he spoke the words.

“What do you mean, to see what you can find,” I asked again?

“Just what I said..., exploratory surgery. Who knows what else in there it is that could be wrong?”

I became angered sharply at his nonchalant behavior in all of this matter. I could not resist asking the obvious question.

“What about the stem that is leaking and the source of all this catastrophe to begin with...What about that?”

He smiled broadly, then spoke...shrugging his shoulders and uplifting both hands as he spoke...

“So what? What about it, mate....?”

I was now astonished at his remark.

“So what.?What about it...? I will tell you what..Are you going to cap it off, because even I know that if you had done so in the beginning, none of this other calamity would have occurred! That's what!

Are you going to do that?"

"Sure that will be done, sure, sure thing about that, but we must look around a bit just to see what else may need addressing that could be causing additional problems."

My wife suddenly perked up just a bit, raising her eyelids and moving slightly as she spoke.

"Who is going to be performing the operation?"

"I will be," he snapped, as if he were attempting to remain confident in himself..

"Oh no...don't let this be..! Oh why, why does it have to be this way," she said as she wept in between her words?

The surgeon smiled a thin fleshless smile, then replied to her question.

"Well it's like this..., there simply is just no one here who exceeds my skill level to perform this task... Matter of fact, to find a person of higher caliber and skill, one may have to go as far away as the Italian coast, on the continent. The task to locate him would be overwhelming, to say the least. Then we would have to transport him here...and all on *our* own dime, I must add here as well.....So..., the choice is like this, being that *we* are simply just forced by circumstance to make use of the resources that we have at our immediate disposal. Personally, unlike the times before, I want to move on this matter within the next three hours, at most. The situation is just *that urgent*, I feel."

"What do you mean by the word, *urgent*," I asked?

"Just what I said...This situation is in need of an immediate address. This is not something that we need to muck around with here."

"If you had just capped the stem off, like you should have, we would be out of here by now," I snapped in anger!

"Please, my love," Thea gasped, "do not anger, forgiveness is the necessary premium here. Let's forgive, not rage in this matter."

"Fine then, sighed the surgeon, Ekviosis, who then continued with a clap of his hands. "I thought

that any concerned person would come to view this matter in its proper perspective. What I need you to do now, sir, is to take this paperwork down to the window and let them address any concerns with you that they might have. Once these concerns have been addressed into their proper perspective, then and only then, we shall proceed on with this matter.”

He handed me a closed, sealed envelope packet of official appearing papers to hand back to the lady behind the glass window, who was appearing more and more as a wicked *witch* behind the glass window, than a lady now. When I passed the envelope beneath the glass, the lady seized upon it, opening it sharply, then she began to slowly examine the paperwork. Time passed like two hours or more, then the lady turned toward the computer and commenced to type. In ten minutes she appeared to complete her typing work, then coldly turned toward me.

“Sir,” she inquired? “The price demanded for total services will be *fifty thousand* drachma. That includes the operation, all the painkillers and anti-biotic, the nurse care and the food, if your wife will be allowed to even eat solid food; if not, then the glucose that she will fed intravenously...Simply put, the entire range of the service will be purchased via this stated price in conclusion...and we need it in *cash* and in *full*... now, please sir.”

“What,” I snapped in shock and rage?! “I...will need time to sell off our first duplex flat investment or something...I don't know how to get it...I mean, what must I do,” I gasped in shock at the demand?

“Well...think of something...and fast, because we need this financial address within the next two hours...The situation here at hand really is just that critical, sir. Do something very quickly here or you may have a real negative situation on your hands to contend with...,” she said in a cold, seemingly pleading voice; but my gut instinct was that her real effort intended to impose the burden of blame upon my shoulders, should anything go wrong.

I quickly pulled my new cell phone from my rear pocket, punching the number of my property managers' office. The phone slowly rang, then answered the snappy voice of his young secretary.

“Hello..., how may we assist you here today,” she said.

“Is Artemis there,” I inquired?

“Yes, but what could he get for you?”

“I want to speak with him. Tell him its Jedi, from the Selenofotos place out on the hill,” I snapped, offering my local nickname that I had acquired around here over the course of time that I had been in residence.

“I sure will,” she replied as the sounds of her stepping away from the phone assaulted my ears. In a minute, the phone picked up.

“Hello, what could I do for you..?”

“Hello.., oh Art, gosh how it sure is nice to hear your voice..I need your assistance and just as quickly as I can get it. I have an emergency on my hands here pal,” I snapped with urgency.

“You know that duplex out on Phoenix street that I purchased three years ago or so..”

“Yes,” he replied, “seems like I do..”

“How much is it worth, right now,” I asked with a gasp in my breath?

“I will have to check the paperwork, but I think that it is worth seventy thousand drachma...Let me see here,” he said.

His voice returned in five minutes, saying..

“Yes, most certainly here, indeed it is worth seventy thousand, without a doubt here. Why, what's up, he asked?”

“Man, my wife is in the infirmary here..and I really do need some real help, and I need it within the next two hours, just to be blunt about it,” I snapped.

“Oh g—d—n, I really do hate that...I really do and I am well aware of how things are around there, but unfortunately, that facility in all of its harsh imbecility, is the very best that we have in a two thousand kilometer radius. How much are you in need of?”

“I need fifty thousand drachma, man and just as quick as you can send it. Could you find a buyer in that time frame, for fifty thousand,” I requested in desperation?

“I doubt it, not in that time frame. What I can do is forward you the money. I shall notate this specific and then you allow me to possess the property when this ordeal is over with. The problem is that it will take me three hours to wire the amount into you. I have so much garbage around here that I am tangled up in right now...,but give me three hours and I promise that the money will be right on your way. Is your banking card still activated..?”

“Yes,” I replied with a gasp.

“Do they have an ATM close by or a Western Union?”

“They have an international ATM right here by the window, about twenty feet or so away,” I replied.

“Great! I will put in an order for the money with a phone call, but you are aware that the health facility charges an interest fee by the hour, aren't you?”

“No, I was not aware of that detail,” I replied.

“It is like, thirty damn percent,” he returned, “but no problem, I can get the cash dropped into your checking account, where you will then simply hand the card to the financial personnel there at the medical facility and they will make the total withdrawal on it. They have their own personal government authorized code, you will endorse it electronically when you hand them the card, and they will follow through on the procedure. I apologize man, I mean, g—d—n..., man, am I sorry about all of this. Maybe you can get them to waive the interest. I doubt it, but it is worth a try. I can tell you, those filthy leeches want every bloody damn dime that they can force out of a person...and nobody anywhere says or does anything about it. They just all float along like zombies walking into a raging hail storm that have been programmed to think that the day is all bright and sunny, that is..., until it is their *own* naked asses that are forced to sit on the red hot griddle or their next of relation, then it is always a different sad story.”

“This is a serious experience for me right now. I mean, my dear wife, Thea, her very life is on the line right now. If I was to lose her, I just don't know what I will do without her, man; I really do not know what it is that I will do!”

“Just hang on there, man and just give me three..., and I will have it in your account. You can work out the property exchange later on with me when all of this crud is over with. I will try to get it there quicker, but I cannot make any promises on that.”

“Just do the very best that you can man.. and please, please...do not forget about me. The property is already yours right now, as far as I am concerned. I just want my dear Thea back.”

We clicked off of the phone, saying our goodbyes as we did so. I had absolutely no time to spare here.

“Sir,” asked the lady behind the glass covered window? “Are you going to deliver on the cash? Time is wasting and we need it immediately to carry on with this procedure. Thirty minutes might as well be five hours, her very life hangs in the balance here. Hurry up with the money...hurry up...money now sir, hurry up or suffer her loss forever..”

Out in the hallway I raced upon seeing the surgeon, Ekvioistis, standing out there aloof..., smiling and laughing, flirting with the young nurses on his staff. An abrupt heated wave of fresh rage moved through my veins. I attempted to fight it all back. He laughed at his own rude joke with the four young ladies who joined in, one of them allowing her short skirt to flip up in his direction as she bent down to pick up a form that had somehow strangely slipped from her grasp, him casually slapping her flatly on the rear, his right hand appearing distinctly to rub in an effort to savor the moment; only then did he glance up to even notice me standing there in gasping astonishment. The midsize young lady laughed with a heavy blush as she stood up...,behaving as though she were honored somehow to have him even take notice of her.

“I have a line on your money, sir,” I said to him as he smiled and laughed so nonchalantly with the

young girls there. “Could you go ahead and proceed forward with the operation,” I inquired?

He turned toward me, with a hedonist smile once directed toward the young nurse still fresh on his face that now seemed to fade into a repressed rage.

“What? What did you say there...?”

“Can you still commence with the procedure on schedule? The cash will be here only just an hour late,” I said with a longing gasp.

“What...? You mean that you do not yet possess the cash..? I mean, g—d---n man, let's come to a simple understanding right now in all of this matter..The money is paramount here, plain and simple, without any exceptions... what so ever. I *must* have the money and on schedule, for me to commence with this procedure. If I do not have it and we lose your wife as a result, then the only one for you to blame will be your self. I will have done my part to neutralize this matter now, but you must just suck-it-all-up, and do yours! I am just so sorry, but life is a bitch, man! Nothing comes for free and no one owes anybody, anywhere a g-d--n thing in this world, fellow; least of all not a poor surgeon with his in-demand skilled services, considering the high cost of medical school and business in general,” he stated with a fleshless smile and a laughing wink back toward the four young nurses, who giggled in agreement with him as if there existed a silent unspoken desire behind the giggle itself.

“Like the old saying goes...I think that I read it once on a tee shirt on a beach over on Patmos island, I believe it was,” he continued to say in what appeared to be a mocking derision of my inability to make another choice in care facilities, “a little room-room for the night, a little zoom-zoom for the car or a little boom-boom for the pride and soul, man, indeed nobody rides for free!” The derisive statement was followed by a sudden ripple of giggles coming from the nurses, and another wink and laugh from the doctor.

My anger nearly raged unto the very point of exploding, but I kept my mouth closed and said nothing. In my ears I could still hear the weeping words of my dear Thea, begging me to just



forgive....to simply plead unto the great spirit beyond for forgiveness, and allow all to go on into the void beyond in peace. *The temporary value in acting on rash, raging imaginations was never worth the cost generated from it*, I envisioned her plea as being.

I quickly raced into the room of my waiting angel, who was now slumbering and barely conscious, so it seemed. I stooped by her side, pressing my weeping face upon her breast.

*“My dear Thea..I have done all that I can do and we are forced to wait and you to endure..I don't want to live without you, my love..If you go, then I shall surely follow...,” I whispered to her as I lay my head upon her breast, feeling the pulse of her still beating heart. “Yea.. though you walk through the dark valley in the shadow of death..., ye shall fear no evil, for I will accompany you in your journey through, always...even into the very end..What indeed will have been a life here lived without you to accompany me, my dear love. I need you here, right with me..., right by my side and nowhere else. Where forever thou shalt go, then shall I follow thee, my love.. Two hearts to abide and thrive, absorbed in completely committed love ...for a most blessed infinity.”*

I glanced up at the clock on the wall, seeing that the three hours had transpired. I gazed up toward the eyes of my dear Thea, which were now gently closed as she became absorbed into a deep slumber, unlike any that I had ever observed in her before. I raced back out toward the glass window, thrusting the bank card before the woman behind the glass, breathing in heaving gasps.

“Calm down there, sir,” she said with frozen words, completely void of any emotion whatsoever.

“Is the money in my account yet, because it very well should be,” I snapped, glancing back and forth from the clock on the wall to her face.

“I do not know..., here, let me see!”

She took the card and pulled up a page on the facility computer. Carefully she punched in the numbers of the card. She then placed the entire card into a machine by the computer that bore a slot just large enough for the card to fit. A hum ensued, then a slot with a reception bowl hanging outside it spat

out the bills in hundreds, ten at a time.

“Looks like all is well. Just as soon as the machine gives us the total delivery in hand, then I will put in a notice via facility email to Dr. Ekvioistis, who will then commence with the procedure at hand. I must warn you, however, that you have already lost an hour. Time is of an immense essence here with this quickly deteriorating situation,” she said.

Soon the machine quit spitting out hundred drachma bills. Then I observed her turning to the computer screen and quickly typing a few keys. In what felt like no time, she then turned toward me, saying..

“Well there you have it...The doctor will be arriving very soon to commence with this procedure. Hope that all ends well with it, sir.”

Quickly on impulse, I raced toward the room of my dear Thea, seeing her lying there all silent and motionless, enveloped in her deep complete slumber. I hung my head and weep-ed tears of passion at my ever looming possible loss. What is it that I was to do now to improve the situation at hand? What were my other options? I sighed deeply, consumed with regret that much more could not have been accomplished on my part, to alleviate this potentially forthcoming horror. Soon the smiling surgeon, Ekvioistis, with the transportation crew and the stretcher.

“It's about time,” he said through his fleshless thin smile. He only seemed to glare upon me as he spoke, as if he was saying that if I had a problem with anything that I should spill it out now, like I had not already done so enough. “You should know by now that the whole world revolves around money and it costs us to provide resources that are in many cases, somewhat scarce, shall we say. Then the people who provide the services must be paid their proper dues and on time. Then we have food that must be accounted for.., and room, of course...”

He continued to smile, but now near to the point of laughing, so I felt at the time..

“But this should have never happened! It is all your fault due to *your* own incompetent oversight,

man,” I yelled in anger and frustration!

Ekviostis sighed, then shook his head as he glared upon me in derision..

“Now..! Now, sir, there...., let's not give in to baseless accusations here. Sometimes clamps are placed on stems and the clamps do not effectively seal...And oh, I am so sorry there, sir, but situations such as this *do* indeed occur. In reality, they are not all that uncommon during these types of procedures..”

“But you are the master surgeon,” I snapped and gasped, still consumed by rage and frustration! “If you had encountered such situations in the past, then why have you not deduced a proper additional preventative measure to ensure that a leak does not then occur? Even a plumber on a section of pipe would take a preventative measure of one sort or another.”

Dr. Ekviostis then sighed deeply again, shaking his head from side to side...

“There you go again, sir...You just don't get it, do you? Cut the baseless accusations, now...!Do you realize that I can file charges on you for slander...hmm? I have that much power and could file charges on you for slander at this very moment, just off what has transpired right here in the company of witnesses. Are you aware that a charge of slander... and the charge is *most certain* to stick like glue..., is a felony offense? Are you aware of what it means to be charged with a felony here on this island...? How old are you there, sir,” he inquired through his rude gesturing icy smirk as he reared back and folded his arms.

I answered not but only heaved in breaths underneath my mounting, teeth gritting rage..

“ I can look at you and deduce that you are more than likely in your late forties there...I can also venture to tell you right now, emphatically, that if you are charged by me with a felony for slander here on this island, that it most certainly would stick and that you would be servant unto me for the remainder of your mortal life remaining. I own vast international poppy farms, fields and land holdings presently being cleared and even a few factories, such as those that process the painkillers and

anti-biotic here..., and *all* of them are in sore need of employees; and you sir, sure appear healthy and strong enough there to make us a fine one, no doubt about it.”

As the transportation crew wheeled my dear Thea out into the operating room, the surgeon continued to smile and speak his imposing, antagonizing words to me, as I could only stand in idle and smolder.

“You and another just like you, would be good for us to make use of inside our facilities. You would serve us well until your fifty-fifth year, then we would be forced to send you away, where you would be compelled by lack of opposing choice, to provide us with testing material...for our latest drug treatments, of course..,” he said with a stretched smile.

“Have a nice day there, sir,” he said as the stretcher supporting my beloved Thea was transported away, he turned to walk behind it as it moved along.

I moved into the main waiting area of the facility there in the hallway again, this time feeling as though I could receive no relaxation while this procedure was continuing on in its course. My heart raced and my mind seemed to swoon in imaginations where I perceived the worst experience that could occur, and where the worst of situations would leave me in light of its materialization. In the distance once or twice...I thought that I could perceive her scream, begging for my immediate assistance. I leaped from my seat, racing into the hallway as though I were mad, only to realize as I proceeded along....., that I had fallen asleep and was dreaming. As I made my way back toward the waiting area, I would glance into the eyes of others who were walking along as they glanced upward into my eyes with astonishing wonderment...Maybe I really was going mad..?

Time passed and it felt like more than a day. I reasoned that the dark of night must in fact be upon us. How long have they been back there with my dear Thea? Have they repaired what they had torn asunder? Have they healed what they have caused to be in such dreadful disrepair? My breathing quickened in its heaving rhythm. I passed through stages from gritting my teeth in raging seething anger, to my heart bleeding with tears and my weeping emotions taking me down into the dark depths

of incapacitation. In a few minutes a surgical assistant appeared at the door of the waiting room..

“The Fortunado family,” she inquired. “ Is anyone from that family present?”

I stood up instantly.

“Follow me, please,” she said.

I did so, I followed her down the hallway into the office area just adjacent to the pay window, where she opened a wooden door and stepped inside. I followed her inside, taking my seat as I crossed the threshold. She dutifully closed the door behind us, taking a seat at the desk to the right as she stepped into the room. On her desk sat neat multiple stacks of papers, she chose one small stack, then shuffled the sheets two or three times before placing them neatly in-front of her to address me.

“Sir, I have been asked by Dr. Ekvioistis to make this informative appeal, then decide on what our next move from here will be....Simply put here..., and it really hurts me to deliver this message.., but we have lost your wife...I am so sorry about all of this. I can only imagine the horror of it all and how this must resound on you at the present. Please be aware, however, that we do provide a wonderful service for you in lieu of situations such as this. Dr. Ekvioistis is a very talented, proud owner of a pre-mortem preparatory service, funeral and burial service... for a nice compact fee, that can be paid for right here within this facility. Matter of fact, the petite classical styled building just across the street there is where the funeral home is. Her grave would be just up on the hill there above us. You may choose the stone right here as well or the mausoleum, whichever the case may be.

If you should take notice, the graveyard is a really nice relaxing, well organized facility, in and of itself. In the foreground we have the contemporary chapel, yet one that is resoundingly and uniquely classical on the inside, that hosts services in all of the local languages and religious types. All of this may be organized right here today within this respective facility and planned out following the convenient, compact, one time payment. All that we must do now is simply plan out the details... You tell me how you want the arrangements, sir, then I shall hand you a nice little paper that you just carry

to the wonderful lady behind the glass there at the pay window beside us right here..., and she will take it up with you from there. So let's initiate the process here and now....What about it, there mate? It is the very least that one could do for their loved on after all of this.``

To me, at that time, her voice bore the ringing sound of existing inside a tight metal drum. The sounds tangled and merged together in such a manner, that I could not even comprehend what it was that she was saying. My tears exploded from my eyes and my torso heaved so violently that I could not even breathe. I only sat and wreathed in my very seat., first from emotion being ripped from a shredded heart, then from real pain that emanated outward from my breast.... and the pounding, throbbing sensation deep inside my throat...

“Sir Fortunado..! You must get a grip on this situation. What has happened is *real*...and there is nothing that you nor anyone else may do to reverse this situation. You must only accept it as it stands, then go on from there. Such is the way of reality and we have left only the single choice of dealing with it. I promise that this sad journey will be just as easy on you., as such is possible to do. Matter of fact, I shall carry the papers over to the lady behind the glass for you, right now at this very moment.”

I heard her feet swish passed me as I swooned, feeling my crumpling body now near collapse. As she passed through the door, I collapsed from my seat upon the icy tile floor of the office building, rolling as I wept with tears that felt as though they would never cease. Time now had no relevance to me, neither did life or death. My form was simply one that existed within a panorama backdrop, with no soul or heart. I knew not nor cared not what my station would be from this point forward, all that I knew was that my Thea was no longer with me and was now never to return. She had been snatched from me by a horrible villain of the worst sort in every way. That single thought I could never remove from my mind and the anger flowed through my veins in radiating waves of white hot flush that came in surges. My feelings fluctuated from sheer hate, into the deepest feelings of loss and sorrow at a situation in which I was totally helpless. Upon the very closing of my eyes, all that I could see was his

face, and I could literally *taste* his now bitter blood....I attempted to shake the imagined taste of his blood from my mouth, but it kept returning in waves, as do the waves of sea back into the shore..

I heard the shuffle of her feet by the door and heard the ease of the door as it moved outward..

“Mr. Fortunado, I have good news for you. The entire package deal has been sealed. I have a tombstone included with the grave up on the hill for your dear wife, unless you would prefer a mausoleum. Of course, you may always have the option to change it into a mausoleum later, if you should choose to. The final choice is ultimately yours, in that regard. The funeral service will be in Orthodox Catholic style and most importantly, you get the entire deal for a really compact price, considering what you are receiving. Would you like to hear the price..? I will go ahead and tell you the price that we have arranged for you. You will get all of these fine services.. for just fifty thousand drachma only.....Isn't that wonderful? No other facility anywhere else provides all of these convenient services that we do..., all compacted into one simple discounted price for our patrons...

Do you know what else is so nice about our services, Mr. Fortunado? You will not even have to handle the money part of it for us. We take care of that matter for our customers as well. You see, we have your banking card number already in our system. Dr, Ekviostis is a really good friend of your property manager. We know how many properties it is that you own, the manager knows that your wife was serviced here and he knows of the situation..., and your incapacitated emotional state as well. So he has kindly and legally agreed to work things out with us on your behalf. The duplex that you own over on Persephone street, the one that you and your late wife lastly purchased and paid off ...Well, your property manager has agreed to simply transfer the title from you over to Dr, Ekviostis. Your verified indebtedness to our facilities and your obvious state of mental incompetence, have automatically granted an indirect legal signature from you, extracted via documents that you have already signed, of which were then uploaded into our corporate website files. That amount derived from your property will cover the entire price, the interest charges, and all additional miscellaneous charges that may apply,

and do so very nicely I must add.

I think that the property was worth one hundred thirty thousand drachma, but your property manager was kind enough to allow Dr. Ekvioistis to obtain it at a generous discount...., all on your behalf, considering your unfortunate situation here. What is still even better about this situation, as I have stated prior., is that we already have your signature, which was legally allowed in lieu of your professionally observed, shattered emotional and mental state. All of us here are very considerate of the prevailing situation that you cannot stand up for yourself competently, so the system allows us to take care of your needs, considering your obliging financial situation with us here. Dr. Ekvioistis is well connected and it is in lieu of these connections that he is able to bring us these kinds of services to offer our patron patients. How blessed we are, indeed, just to have him here employed within our wonderful facility.”

I simply continued to weep and only wreath on the floor before the desk as she spoke. I could not even rationalize the sound of her voice . Her words just rang out in the drum of the void into which she so callously opened her mouth to release them. She continued to speak but I could comprehend them not as I lay there on the floor, weeping at the horrible tragedy of my heart wrenching loss. I did not want to remain here alone...in such a cold, unforgiving world without the presence and company of my beloved Thea...

....The remainder of my very true tale of woe...was more like a hazy Gothic horror than a modern tragedy of any sort. The next frame that enters into my mind is the scene of myself standing alone there within the in-state cathedral room...my dear love laying there bearing an ash like appearance in her face.. and body ..of peaceful eternal slumber. Her petite gentle hands were folded neatly upon her navel to bear a chrysanthemum bundle of calcimine and cerulean hydrangea. Her face was draped in petals of lavender rose, with a very thin net veil of mist covering it. Her dress bore the striking likeness of our own wedding dress....I broke down again in tears out of my inability to accept the sight as it loomed



right there before me. There it was, however, the horror of my worst nightmare..., right there standing before me as I wept...

“My dearly beloved Thea,” I whispered as she lay there draped in eternal slumber. “I have not forgotten my pledge to you, my love. You will not travel alone for much longer..I have a few things that I must do before I go away from here to join you in this journey. As we traveled together within the veil of completely contented life here on earth, so shall we both do so beyond...for a blessed ethereal eternity..I love you, my dear Thea...I love you more than dear life itself. Without you there is no life here....Without you, there exists nothing, but that of a looming foreboding void.”

As I spoke I touched her cold, wax like hollow cheeks beneath the veil, then the thought struck me..I glanced around and upon seeing no one within nor noticing cameras anywhere inside the facility where I then stood..., I proceeded to unbutton her blouse...then I beheld it, the terror of my worst perception..I saw the stitches down the center of her torso where obviously the villain had made his incision for the purpose of making extraction...! What horrified me and enraged me most, was when I instantly deduced that the extraction was made *just prior* to death, since organs are rendered useless upon death of the body...I can only imagine the terror and pain that my poor dearly beloved must have endured...right before her last breath.! I gnashed my teeth in seething rage at the thought, collapsing my head upon the edge of the sarcophagus, only to weep at my sorrow for my inability to save her from the inexcusable pain and suffering....., a shear agonizing torture of which an innocent in the highest degree....was so callously forced to endure.

“Oh my dear love, Thea...Had I been the man you perceived that you had married, then I could have deduced a method of your salvation from this terrifying experience that you have so dreadfully been forced to endure...Shame on me, my love, for not coming to your assistance...I failed you miserably, my dear love...I failed you miserably.! Oh.., but what now am I to do without you, my dear love, Thea,...?What am I to do now..? All the earth about me now has no meaning without your blessed

company, just what on earth am I now to do.?”

I lifted my tearing eyes to gaze once again upon her face of chalk ash. I had no indication in her perception of my presence, but on the outside I perceived the roar of rolling thunder in the looming distance through the silent stone walls. I visualized a strike of lightning causing her to arise into a seated position within the sarcophagus to embrace me once more again, but every time that the fire flashed, the sapphire light only revealed to me again.., her sullen motionless face, only slightly hinting of light blue chalk. Though I *felt* the presence of her spectrum form, my mortal eyes beheld it not, nor any sign of it about. Had she appeared and demonstrated a terrifying rage, then I would have held her not in blame for doing so. Deep down in silence I prayed that she would do just such of an act or one even worse than that of my imagination...., but all that I only beheld was her ridged form of chalk and ash, only laying motionless right there inside a silver sarcophagus enveloped within a silken interior of perfect calcimine, like her very form was sealed there in incessant contentment..., for the duration of timeless infinity.

In the far distance from across the expanse of town, the majestic chime lulled the twelfth striking, the sound of which resembled a gargantuan bell that only tugged the droning chime out for long minutes with each thundering ring, shocking me back into the horrifying panorama now abruptly thrust before me, one that I wished dearly would only vanish from before my eyes, never to return ...Only by that thundering announcement was I aware of times passage. As the bell continued to lull with a drone that dominated all the air about, I perceived the voices of numerous unseen spectrum whispering in offending tones that acknowledged my presence. On numerous occasions I perceived that my name was spoken aloud in a demanding voice, screaming for me to act in lieu of the terrible wrong done to one so divine and most innocent. I even perceived that her very blood screamed a commanding condemning voice..., a voice that loomed distinctly in my very ear with each drone of the midnight chime.

On the outside beyond, I only detected the roll of thunder which had moved *closer* in upon us. In the far distance I heard the closing of a door that I intuitively knew was the only passageway from the inside of the chapel into the antagonistic outside beyond. I perceived the outside latch clink in its seal. The only light present was that from the fire of the sky through the stained glass windows, which allowed me to view her face, again and once more repetitively. As I witnessed her figure in the flash of the fire, I envisioned that she had picked up her face to turn into my direction, but I could never deduce whether it was to embrace me out of passion or scorn me out of bitter derision.

Here it was, however, that I spent my last night in company of my dearly beloved, Thea, holding her lifeless form there lying motionless inside the eternal sarcophagus, through the duration of the candle lit night, the candles twain by the ends of the silver sarcophagus and the flash of lightning without; I only weeping hot tears at my inability to feel her life beneath my breast once more again or savor the sensation of her warm breath upon my longing cheek. ..Even now, I felt as though I did not want to ever let go, but only longed to follow..., submit unto the ethereal journey into an expansive void of all time and space, but yet one in which I remained in timeless company with my dearly beloved.

“Oh my dearest Thea,” I whispered into her ear as she lay, “ allow me to feel your life once more again...Appear unto me as I presently stand.., allow me to view your spectrum existence, just only for one final time , then I can go on with my life knowing well of your comfort in that present state...”

I glanced over as the edifying fire flashed again, seeing only her ashen face enveloped in what was even more obviously now an eternal slumber with no end. There was no emotion from her, no hint of any to come..Only the indigo flash and the rolling rumble bore any hint of possibility for a life beyond. The flashing of the fire seemed to acknowledge answers to my prayers and my earnest requests as I spoke them into the ears of my lost love, now gone on beyond. I felt an unseen presence there within the chapel, but could perceive only an imperceptible void of timeless emptiness that was slowly robbing me of my calculating mortal sanity... I could.... perceive an outside presence now gradually

entering into the very being of my breast, however, that was replacing that of my very soul, causing my present sorrow to transform...; causing my mortal breath to gradually heave and my teeth to grind into a decisive determination, as I glared once again into her motionless face of cobalt chalk and ash while she lay....

I had sworn my pledge aloud unto the gods in heaven above, and my dearly beloved Thea, while she lay still yet alive..barely. I know not what shall follow except a vindication, a vindication for a massive wrong done without provocation, on part of neither myself nor my dear love, Thea. We only sought beauty, health and happiness in life, designing only for such, both in our lives and the lives of all others who surrounded us. We were members of our local parish church, our community outreach programs, we were the best contributors into our local assisting charities and philanthropic agencies. We assisted not only with the gift of revenue, but with a generous gift of our precious free time. We allowed local children relief programs to make use of our estate grounds to accommodate the people involved with their activities and program hosting. We gave generously to assist the poor and those in abject need, financially, due to medical hardship. When the day came that we only needed medical services, behold, how we were allowed to suffer so dreadfully...! Where are the cherubs to plead our longing case for justice? Where are the angels who will stand throughout and mourn? Indeed...,upon what heart must one thread to invite all the spirits of the beyond, to advance forward in a manner that will cause the guilty to *fear* from the wrong that they have so viciously committed?

The days following the last night spent with my dear love, Thea, only consist of a deeply blurred haze, combined both with my constant tears, my face plunged only into the depths of my pillow and the constant scourge of strong drink...hoping to drown out all of my sadness and the pain of my sudden lose. She had been stolen from me by that villain..that wretch...that pig of a being shaped as a human, but with the soul of a devil right out of hell's horrible belly. How dare he strike a blow such as this, then endeavor to hide behind the protective covers within the same unchecked system that allowed him to

commit such a felony offense! In the deepest height of my rage, my emotion would only collapse back into a grinding sadness that felt as though it would never end....

....Then came that most horrid of days, that day of which I never longed for nor attempted to contemplate..., no certainly not in music nor in word of the written page. I recall how her relations pulled me gently from upon my berth as I wept continuously, helping me to sup, assisting me to dress, then allowing me transport in their lavish car...pausing before the elaborate cathedral door. I reluctantly passed over the threshold, passing through the huge thick wooden doors opened, then at the fore of the congregation hall...I beheld it looming from beyond as my heart sank into the depths of my gut...sitting beneath a huge radiating cross of illuminating gold.

I could not cease in my weeping as the silver sarcophagus just sat there..., eternally motionless...before the looming cross in the backdrop. I dreaded the clearing of the wet haze in my eyes, for want of not viewing the silver sarcophagus; but as the congregation filled the hall, my eyes commenced to clear. I heard the drone of the huge pipe organ as it played the *Latin fiesta*, which I knew to be her favorite, though somewhat haunting melody.

On the outside loomed the ghostly push and whisper of a once gentle, but increasing blustery wind. Through the cathedral stained glass windows flashed the cobalt flame, then following, the resounding, rolling thunder. The design of the windows bearing the portrait of their stained glass, appeared to accommodate the flash of the fire in numerous instances, many of them changing their entire form and portrait, with the indigo flash causing some colors to blot out and others to transform in the instant, only to return to their original at the same instant of the flash ceasing. The genius of the artist here being that he could actually design these colors to form completely new portraits by making use of this action in the flash. How many dreadful months did it take him to deduce which specific colors could be placed where, to accommodate this instantaneous action in light and then manipulate it into such an explicit, artistic manner as to organize a panoramic relaxing willow enshrouded water portrait or that of

an exotic Elysium tropical garden with an instant flash of lightning?

The inside of the cathedral was now dark, with the drone of the organ looming hauntingly in the foreground until the last person entered into the congregation room. When the last one entered inside, the doors eased shut with the snug sound of closure. Now it had begun to rain, first lightly, judging by the sound on the outside, of hammering on the stained glass panes and slightly on the roof, then increasingly heavy as the shower of a huge downpour. The light abruptly beamed in the direction of the Priest who stood with a thurible of incense, swinging it unto the left and the right sides..., then pausing before the podium, standing. He paused rigidly, then commenced to speak unto the congregation.

“Oh my weeping blessed ones, we have gathered here to pay our respects to a dear one among us...; indeed one who did not ask to be here before us presently, but was violently thrust before us by unfortunate circumstance... Please allow us to pause and contemplate her life and her passing. Allow us to gaze forward upon this dismal sarcophagus, radiating forth our pleasant thoughts and most respectful contemplations....”

The Priest swung the thurible of bronze again from the left unto the right. Now it appeared not as a simple lantern of brass, but as a roman styled lantern of the purest bronze. Later on I was told that this type of lantern, in combination with the proper incense, allowed for a peaceful embrace of the soul as it transgressed from the present into the hither unto. He then chanted ancient phrases in Latin as he swung the timeless thurible.

Oh my dear ones,

let's do remember our loved one on this  
moment.

Let's put out our right hands forward  
toward the dreaded sarcophagus,

to embrace the soul as it moves forth on its timeless journey May she go forward in company  
of the one most divine, always,  
for the duration of a most blessed infinity.

Amen.

Then the priest commenced to speak those words which caused minds to swoon and recollections to  
fill with reflections of a life that was now passed on into infinity.

“We gather here today not out of condemnation, but out of reflection alone and our condolences for  
those now consumed by their moment of dreadful loss. For those of whom know of Thea Selenofotos,  
then you were well aware of the living angel who walked next to all that was divine in her daily life, in  
every way. Those of you who did not know of her delightful charm, so blessed with divine elegance in  
her mannerisms and methodologies, then take thy comfort that the person who lies now before you..  
was one of whom could be adored by all, on grounds of her active community endeavors alone, if not  
by her personal charm. She lived as a friend of all, from the gentle child right on up to the eldest adult.  
Most surely her greatest love was that of the people who surrounded her and the Lord God of heaven,  
whom she most righteously adored. Let it be stated right here on this evening, dear Thea, that on this  
very moment, where ever it is that you now walk..., that you *are* in fact, not walking alone..., for by both  
your side and that of our Lord walks the projected spirit of this entire congregation...So in the name of  
us all., fare thee well, dear Thea Selenofotos from Nymphania on the hill, fare thee very well for all  
eternity, as you go...Amen and Amen..”

A flash of fire heralded the last sentence of his words, then came the rolling rumble following the  
Amen. On the outside rain fell in extremely heavy sheets, as if some sort of rare raging storm fresh  
from the tropics had moved in and settled upon the city. The wind picked up as the rain fell. Every now  
and again the wood structure within the stone walls sounded as if it were moaning from the force of the

wind without.

Then came the thunder of the massive pipe organs to expunge all other sounds. The tune was *Bach, Toccata and Fugue in D minor* and we all stood with the astonishing announcement of the pipe hymn. I saw them close the sarcophagus, locking the lid down firmly into place, concealing the chalk face of my dearest Thea, from the view of both my eyes and the eyes of an imposing world without. My head commenced to swoon, my breath stumbled..., my eyes clouded from the shower of tears as they wheeled the sarcophagus passed and on down the aisle. Now I knew beyond the shadow of a doubt, that my dear Thea was fleeing from me and my adoring grasp, soon to be gone from both me and the earth for all eternity. My heart could not tolerate the throbbing pain and my knees soon collapsed with my weeping, heaving sobs... to the point that I was assisted by three attendants who walked beside me on both sides, and one behind to catch me when I fell.

I walked underneath an umbrella that they held for me as I made my way behind the sarcophagus. They thrust it into the transporting vehicle as I stepped into the vehicle that followed. My head swooned as the majestic chime looming in the distance across town lulled the twelfth stroke of midday..., again..., and again..., then again..., and on for the next twelve minutes. I wept in a continuous flood, for I knew now that truly my well wishes were for all eternity, and the mere thought just broke my poor heart into a thousand painful fragments.

I do not recall how long it was that I traveled..., on the next instant seemingly, we were driving through the graveyard on the hill. At the backside of the huge graveyard was a shallow pond born from a small flowing creek, with a willow canopy just beside a pond that shaded over into the graveyard. It was here that her new crypt was situated. The land area was not flat, but consisted of a gentle roll there on the hill summit, upon which sat her new mausoleum crypt. I saw them take her coffin out of the transport vehicle, open the door of the crypt, then slide the coffin inside. A heavy metal door was closed behind the coffin, above which would eventually be placed a permanent concrete seal. Above



the door was chiseled these words in stone:

*Thea Selenofotos,  
from Nymphania on the hill.*

*Born 19--, Died 19--.*

*As the wind whispered through the trees by the gentle flow of the creek, so shall her spirit abide in blessed paradise for all eternity. May the Lord , therefore, be so kind as to allow her splendid memory to thrive among men for just as long..*

I can vividly recall the gathering by her crypt, but I neither heard not nor could decipher the meaning of the words thereof. I beheld the Priest as he read the words, and spoke the wisdom that allowed a certain permanence in closure for most minds present. In the midst of my tears, there was no time nor space or meaning to any of it. The meaning of my standing there before the crypt held as much standing for me as the rain drops did in the tunes that they splashed out as they fell upon the earth around me...

*..... Inside my mind I could vividly recall how the security allowed me to walk back into the medical facility, with no checks to govern my actions nor to search my person. I could vividly recall how I noticed the security all throughout the facility, everywhere from the lobby right on back into the surgery room.....and that picture kept flashing in my tortured mind... again....and again, nay and even once more AGAIN, just like the blue fire in the sky above....*

.....Time transpired, I know not how much. I can recall making my way down into the lawyers' office, reported to be one of the very best on the entire island, inquiring with him concerning my rights to combat the evil done and protest what had occurred inside the facility, in the name of my dearly beloved Thea, who has now so divinely departed.

“Look, Mr. Fortunado, you know that the accused surgeon owns this town and even is a large

contributor within the nation as a whole. There is no law made that can touch him, to be quite blunt about it..unless it is that you can *prove* infraction beyond the slightest question. I must inform you that I know him very well and who his attorneys are, and to try and fight the system, in this case.., is useless. I mean, to be honest about it and dirt specific, fighting it is hopeless...All that you'll do is just lose tens of thousands more drachma, eventually impoverish yourself and sadly then be just as far along with it as you are right now. Matter of fact, once you have reached that state of being financially incapacitated, it could be that then, in-fact, *you* would be the one charged with false accusation and slander.., which is a very serious offense here. The best thing that you can do, sir, is just pick the pieces up and move on with life. I hate to say it like this, but just let the dead die ...and simply move on, sir. I believe you and understand your situation, and you are not the first who has addressed his concerns with me under very similar circumstances, but honestly, fighting is useless....I will say it again, just let the dead be dead and move on with life, Mr. Fortunado.”

*Move on to where*, I can recall thinking? Move on to where without the company of my dear Thea, and the love so divine that she had to offer me? What kind of man am I? Who cannot vindicate the great transgressions made against her? Where then lies her precious honor without proper vindication...?

Many months passed. I cannot recollect how many there were, since my mind has continually been consumed by a heavy haze induced from constant frustration and heart wrenching emotional pain.....I can only recall putting in with the security company for work there at the infirmary.... I worked very well on the job.., taking notes, observing, recording every event, collecting identification from visitors, regulating traffic and issuing parking tickets. I was literally thrown the keys and told that I owned the place, and to go anywhere and observe; doing so was, in-fact, *my job*, so I was told.

I did so with pride and a newly radiating joy... I walked the floors and made every note. I logged in the time that *he* arrived there into the facility, the times that *he* made his exit, where specifically it was

that *he* parked and where it was that he parked most. I knew well where it was that he came from and was going to. I knew where his personal work station was, his personal office, the specific elevator that he took to go from the basement onto the third floor of the surgery room and exactly how to make use of it...In fact, I learned *every* specific detail about him....

....I arose very well rested on that fateful morning....I merrily dressed in my usual security uniform. Upon my drink stand by my bedside lay my stainless razor edged dirk. I seized it up...., dropping it into my hip pocket. ....In the air all about me I could perceive those sweet songs being sung by my dear Thea, as she whispered her tunes of adoration into my wanting ears while I labored dutifully in my efforts. All was like a foggy haze on that day.The lightning flashed, the clouds above blocked my view of the sun, but one which glowed most brilliantly toward me from a spiritual apex rather than a secular one..Behold...the whispers of spirits riding on the very wind spoke echoing words of approval to me as I went along. I went into my place of work on that day, as I can recall well..., and it soon became time for me to make my rounds..

....In the distant beyond, I thought that I heard that pipe organ playing the same concerto by Bach, *the Toccata and Fugue in D minor*. Then I witnessed the villain enter the facility. I beheld his sick smile, though he failed miserably to recall who I was, it appeared. He passed me and paused by the elevator door..., I quietly walked and paused just behind him. He stepped through the door, then I silently stepped through...The stainless steel double doors closed..I heard the voices of spirits in heaven welcoming me home, then I also heard the voices of demons in hell urging me forward into my new endeavor....

...I glanced upward toward him, then I beheld that split second in time where the moment was absolutely perfect, like no other before nor any other that would come ever afterward, I knew it! The most perfect moment shining brilliantly in such a way that I knew it would never shine again...It was like an invisible raging spectrum seized my wrist and right hand..., another powerful force possessed

my very body and soul..., but I saw the right hand do the dirty deed with my own eyes...and the exposed shinny razor sharp blade sank deep into his neck at the base on the back side..., then the razor edge slashed with a perfection that would have rivaled even those of his own...! I saw the blood gush...I saw him collapse into a wreathing heap onto the floor without even uttering a single sigh...I beheld the hand slash and stab nine more times until the involuntary contortions ceased; inside I felt the tension of the intense anger pleasurably exhaust itself with the expenditure of all might into the slashing stabs.... and the body then lay perfectly still inside puddles of thick crimson syrup that bore the pungent scent of freshly butchered pork.

...Carefully I wiped the blade off onto his own clothes, then replaced it into the skin sheath inside my right hip pocket. The elevator paused, then the doors opened into an empty hallway. I simply pushed the button to go back down into the basement and the elevator did so, without any pauses. I walked out of the medical facility and eased back into my car. The radio was on and playing the fifteenth concerto. I drove my car back to my home on the hill, parked it. I said my goodbyes, then proceeded to walk down the hill to where my broken pony was still tied and tended. I untied it, saddled up and began riding the horse back out toward the edge of town. The wind had picked up dramatically and I was soon riding back out into the vast tree scattered, sand swept wilderness surrounding the town and covering the huge island.

...As I moved along across the sands through the scattered forests, all that I could see was the spectrum figure of my dear Thea there in the distance before me. She was beckoning me to follow, to romp with her through the Elysium fields of precious netherland and to savor the company of all those whom I now only thought were lost for a timeless infinity. There was one place that I sought to go here in the wilderness. A lone chalky cliff side, some half a kilometer high above a gentle purling creek of the purest perfect sapphire. Though the creek appeared shallow and narrow from high above, that appearance was an evil illusion. Actually the creek was somewhat vast and very deep, more akin to a

river than a simple creek.

On a ledge high above the creek, I nestled. In my backpack I had plenty of food stored..., so I waited for them..., until they came for me. On the ledge..., at long last divine... it was that I spent my remaining days in company with the spectrum of my dear love, Thea... Though she existed within the realm of what for mortals was unattainable, yet by her own determined force in free choice of will..., she transcended through the thick gray misty gulf separating the mortal from the immortal..We loved a love of the purest delight right there on the ledge, which was far more intense, even more so than any I had ever experienced with her during her secular years..Now beyond question, I knew it was that I could never live again being absent from her company... I yearned now more than ever before, to love a love not just for the momentary, but for the blessed eternal divine..

.....On the hill in the distance I could perceive their raging blood hounds and their rasping imperceptible shouts. I heard the clamor of horses hooves on both sides high above me. In the distance a lone voice yelled, “there he is, do you see him through the binoculars? There he is..., right there on Calypso's hills eastern ledge below...!”

Then spoke another strange harsh voice from above on the cliff summit behind me... “Get the army rifle my avenging companions..! We have him now and there is no escape for him what-so-ever..! He'll pay the maximum right here and now for his cold calculating, dastardly deed.. Who does he think that he is to commit such a vile act unto one of our finest, and please pause just a moment to consider...,while he was residing right here in our own nation?! Just who is it, that these foreigners who dare to come here, think that they are?”

I heard the sharp thunder and the singing glance of their lead. A thick haunting smoke like mist then rolled inward from across the expanse beyond the jagged chalk of the white cliff and the ravine below. As I glanced below into the shimmering depths, I viewed the circling swarm of what appeared to be thousands, if not millions, of welcoming cooing snow doves, freely offering forth their sweetest of

exhilarating serenade...

*I heard the sharp thunder and the singing whine of their lead as it glanced from upon the cliff walls immediately above my head...*

....Then the thick veil of gray mist finally moved across the expanse to consume me, hiding my fleshly form from their tainted view as my body lifted up into the awaiting arms of my dearest beloved., my most cherished blessing from holy God in heaven above., Thea' Selenofotos in spectrum. As we flew together, the angels from deep within the invisible depths of the hallowed void, screamed their cheers of exalted welcoming as we entered into that most divine haven of the immortal realm..., only to love a perfect unadulterated love entwined together, embracing arm in adoring arm ....for the duration of a most blessedly glowing infinity.

